

THE BIG SPLIT

NAVIGATING THE SCHISM OF THE UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH



**SESSION 3: NUTS AND
BOLTS**

HOLD UP! WHO IS WHO?!?

In our mid-discernment check-in, there were a massive portion of you that were undecided and confused about which organization wanted what. There were also a fair few of you that were theologically-progressive that wanted to leave the UMC and some theological conservatives that wanted to stay, which is certainly *allowed*, but does raise some suspicions. Let's take a minute and try to figure out who is who before we get too far in.

Part of the confusion is likely because of the counter-intuitive way things played out. Usually, if you want change something, you choose to leave. If you want something traditional, you stay right where you are. When it comes to Methodist beliefs, if you want things to *change*, you need to *stay put*. If you want things to stay closer to *traditional* Christianity, you need to *leave*.

How did we end up in a situation like this? Methodist politics. Not a lot of us know about Methodist government, so let's start by comparing it to our nation's government. The United States has a legislative branch (they make the laws), a judicial branch (they see if the laws are fair), and an executive branch (they enforce the laws). The UMC has those same three branches. The UMC's legislative (rule-making) branch is the **General Conference**, which is controlled by representatives from churches around the world. They vote on church law. The judicial branch (who sees if the laws are fair) is the **Judicial Council** (basically the UM supreme court). The executive branch (who enforces the laws) is the **Council of Bishops**.

Think back to our first lesson: same-sex marriage is our *shibboleth*. How people feel about that issue is often indicative of other loyalties and broadly reflects the division between evangelicals and Christian progressives. Theological progressives want it and keep bringing it to vote, but the UMC has too many theologically conservative voters for same-sex marriage to pass become legal in church law. Bishops, the ones responsible for enforcing the laws, are often theologically progressive and choose not to enforce rules about same-sex marriage because they don't agree with them. Theological conservatives keep voting to keep traditional beliefs on the books, but if nobody enforces them, what's the point of having them?

In 2019, there was a special session of conference to vote on same-sex marriage. This was billed as the final vote, because it had been voted on again and again for 50 years and people are tired of voting on it. Theological conservatives won the vote (as they have for the past 50 years). To help the vote serve as a genuinely FINAL vote, there were rules added to the Book of Discipline to obligate the bishops to enforce the laws whether or not they personally agreed with them. The Judicial Council (UM Supreme Court) reviewed the new law after it passed and decided that it was unconstitutional. There can be laws about same-sex marriage, but the bishops get to enforce them as they see fit. That brings us back to where we started: nobody really wins. In simpler terms, of the 3 branches of government, the theological conservatives control one (the General Conference) while the theological progressives control two (the Council of Bishops and the Judicial Council).

Theological conservatives are leaving the UMC because even though they can write laws and keep the ones that exist on the books, the bishops won't enforce them and the Judiciary Council invalidates laws that would require the bishops to act. The theological conservatives are leaving to create the Global Methodist Church, which will keep orthodox theological statements on the books and give less power to bishops so they can't defacto invalidate laws by refusing to enforce them. Theological progressives in the UMC will finally have a majority in the legislative branch after this, so they can write new laws to change the church's stances. That's the short version as to why leaving means no theological change and staying means theological change.

And yes, that's an oversimplification. There are churches in the UMC that have been doing gay marriages for years. There are bishops from decades ago that didn't believe Jesus was God. The Methodist Church has been contested for a while, but most congregations don't see a lot of those battles behind the scenes. Just remember, traditional theology means leaving. Progressive theology means staying.

And you'll remember I said in the beginning that there was no choice for things to stay the same. I wasn't kidding. It's not as simple as "no change = GMC" and "change = UMC". Yes, the UMC will change their beliefs after the traditionalists leave and the GMC will represent traditional beliefs, but there's another layer

to all of this: the form. Since the traditional Christians are leaving, they're the ones that will have a new denomination, and while most of the processes in the GMC are almost identical to the UMC, they are proposing a few reforms. The UMC will be unlikely to see a change in any of its processes in the near future. The GMC obviously thinks its changes make things better, but that's for you to judge.

Staying in the UMC will mean the same form with new beliefs.

Going to the GMC will the same beliefs, but with a new form.

Which do you prefer? Wait until today's material before you say! There's more to know!

Just to reinforce what we've said so far, here's a little chart. Feel free to look at your old handouts to see influential sources from each side explaining each of these positions further.

<u>Doctrine Beliefs</u>	<u>Global Methodist Church</u> Traditional/Evangelical	<u>United Methodist Church</u> Progressive
Scripture	Inerrant Word of God. Ultimate authority.	Historic writings that can inform how we think. Not binding.
Same-Sex Marriage	No. The Bible says not to.	Yes (within a few years). It's about justice.
Jesus	The savior that was born of a virgin, died for our sins, and is the only path to salvation	Radical teacher that wanted justice for the outcast. Possibly mythologized.
Religion	Primarily about truth. Only one can be true.	Primarily about morality. Many truths are valid.

LET'S GET STARTED!

So what are the differences in form between the GMC and the UMC? Let's dig in and look. All of the policies that we'll be looking at can be found in the Global Methodist Church's *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline* (available free online at <https://globalmethodist.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/Transitional-Discipline.2022041257.pdf>) and the UMC's *Book of Discipline* (available free at <https://www.cokesbury.com/book-of-discipline-book-of-resolutions-free-versions>).

A helpful difference between the two entities that you'll notice throughout is the style of church governance each group favors. The UMC will favor a more **episcopal** style of church government. An episcopal church government has power concentrated in bishops, which can make proclamations on behalf of the body at large. In other words, this is a top-down model of governance with a wider number of church agencies supported by tithes. The GMC will favor a more **congregational** style of church government. A congregational government tends to have power vested in individual congregations which have greater autonomy. There are fewer church agencies in these models, which means the amount of money requested from each congregation to support the denomination is lower in the hopes that they'll use their money effectively in their local setting. Neither the GMC nor the UMC are pure episcopal or congregational structures, so don't take this comparison too literally. Frankly, they're very similar organizations. That being said, you will consistently notice as we work our way through the list that the UMC tends to favor a strong, centralized church government with a lot of agencies, whereas the GMC tends to favor a less centralized structure with more authority for local churches.



DOCTRINE AND SCRIPTURE



The UMC may have officially moved away from doctrinal pluralism, but you'll notice that most of their doctrinal standards use language that denotes that doctrines are good starting points, but not necessarily true. The creeds are a good example of this. Creeds are brief summaries of Christian truths. They were created so that Christians could teach the core parts of their faith to new converts and quickly remember the essentials of faith. The Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed are two of the oldest and most influential creeds in Christianity. They're printed in the *Book of Worship* and the *Hymnal*, but paragraph 102 of the Book of Discipline describes creeds as part of our "ecumenical heritage" and in paragraph 103 it warns that creeds are not "absolute standards for doctrinal truth and error." There are no requirements for churches or ministers to affirm them. They're interesting pieces of history, but not juridical documents (legally-binding). If a pastor does not believe in the creeds, that's not a problem. To use one of our historic voices, "there is no Methodist party line." Pastors can broadly preach what they want, since doctrine is not enforceable.

Meanwhile, the GMC is committed to traditional Christianity with a loyalty to the basic creeds (Apostles and Nicene) and a new focus on the founding documents. If you think back to our sermon by John Machen, you can see the commitment that the GMC has to historic doctrinal positions and the sense that Christianity is about certain truths; a failure to preach those truths represents a total failure of the church to be genuinely Christian. To continue our example of the creeds, the GMC's Book of Doctrine reads that the ancient Christian church "formulated creeds such as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition as accurate expressions of this faith" (paragraph 101). They claim that the creeds are objectively true and critical summaries of the faith. If a pastor preaches something against one of the creeds, they will be held accountable by the governing body.

In simpler terms, GMC pastors have historically orthodox beliefs that they're expected to preach. UMC pastors have more latitude to preach what they want, even if it doesn't align with historic Christian norms.

Another difference between the GMC and the UMC is the way they think about Scripture. In the section "Our Theological Task" in the UMC's Book of Discipline, they say that all religious knowledge is gained in a distinctly Methodist way via the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This tool, created by Albert Outler in the 70s, says that scripture, reason, tradition, and experience are all necessary to interpret Scripture properly. Christian progressives especially like this model, since personal experience is valued so highly. More orthodox Methodists have bristled at the system, lamenting that Scripture is considered as authoritative as personal experience. The GMC removed this particular model from its place in the discipline, vouching for clear doctrines about Biblical authority and statements about receiving the same faith that the saints before us passed down from the disciples. The GMC sees Scripture as an authority to be obeyed and tradition as vitally important, whereas the UMC sees Scripture and tradition as something to be engaged with as equals using your own reason and experiences.

PROCESSING TOGETHER

Some churches don't use creeds very often, so let's look at one. Here is the Apostle's Creed, a summary of the essentials of the faith passed down from the second century. The UMC does not require their pastors to affirm this as true, while the GMC requires pastors to affirm it and preach according to it. What do you think?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

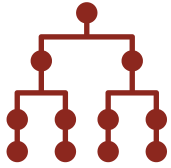
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*catholic means universal

SHOULD PASTORS BE EXPECTED TO PREACH IN ALIGNMENT WITH THIS
CREED? WHY OR WHY NOT?

ARE THERE ANY BELIEFS THAT PASTORS SHOULD BE EXPECTED TO HOLD?

DO YOU THINK YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES ARE AS AUTHORITATIVE AS
THE BIBLE? DO YOU THINK CHRISTIAN TRADITION IS MORE AUTHORITATIVE
THAN YOUR SENSE OF REASON?



SOCIAL WITNESS AND STRUCTURE



The United Methodist Church currently has both its Social Principles (42 pages) and its *Book of Resolutions* that detail the church's position on a range of social issues. Neither of these documents are binding, so you are free to agree or disagree with them. The documents are created by an official committee and intended to represent "a prophetic witness" to be taught to UM congregations. The GMC has a much smaller list of stances on social issues (2 pages), though clergy and churches (when acting corporately) are expected to act in accordance with those principles.

Most of the GMC's positions are pretty uncontroversial. Being anti-child labor and anti-human trafficking is hardly wild. There are two that would stand out as controversial in our political landscape: abortion and same-sex marriage. The current language in the Book of Discipline regarding abortion is... well... ambiguous to say the least. The GMC has an unambiguously anti-abortion position (with exceptions for if the mother's life is at stake). This contrasts with the UMC's projected position after the split. The UMC's agency, The General Board of Church and Society, was a member in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice until 2016 when the General Conference (legislative body) voted for them to withdraw. With evangelicals departing for the GMC, their return to that committee is likely. Again, while the UMC currently does not allow same-sex marriage on paper, bishops do not enforce church laws about same-sex marriage. With evangelicals leaving to form the GMC, the UMC's legislative body should have the votes to officially change the position on the books to allow same-sex weddings within a few years.

The UMC's Social Principles is a long document and ranges from statements about space, to the death penalty, to neocolonialism. It would be surprising to find someone who agreed with every stance, but if we think back to what we said earlier, the UMC tends to be a more top-down model. A document that represents official stances to be taught to laypeople is a positive good in this model. If they don't agree with everything, that's ok. The church will continue to

represent its stances publicly through its administration. The UMC's General Board of Church and Society exists to advocate for its selected policies in Washington DC.

The differences between the social witness of these two organizations points to their fundamental postures. The UMC tends to see themselves as a powerful organization that can influence social change on a broad scale. The power is vested in the Board of Church and Society both to determine social causes worthy of support and leverage the denomination's power against them. Engaged churches will be sent educational materials on these positions so they can adjust course as needed. The Global Methodist Church's social documents are intended primarily to serve the local church. It's a reflection of where the denomination is at collectively, rather than the opinions of a specific board. While individual positions may still vary from congregant to congregant, there's a sense that local churches can follow the principles actively, rather than be gradually taught the principles through denominational communications. The question is, is the frontline of social witness a denominational committee? Or the local church?

PROCESSING TOGETHER

HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE UMC'S SOCIAL PRINCIPLES?

HOW MUCH DO YOU LOOK TO YOUR DENOMINATION FOR LEADERSHIP REGARDING POLITICAL ISSUES?

WHAT ARE A CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL ADVOCACY? WHAT IS THE LIMIT?



THE TRUST CLAUSE



This also brings us to the biggest hurdle for transferring from the UMC to the GMC. Disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church is not free. When John Wesley first started creating Methodist churches (before Methodism was even a denomination), he ensured that all Methodist buildings contained something called a “trust clause.” The trust clause ensures that property owned by each individual congregation is actually owned by the denomination. To leave the denomination with your property, you’re essentially required to buy the property from the denomination. This makes disaffiliation prohibitively expensive most of the time.

Due to current disaffiliation protocol that expires at the end of 2023, the cost to leave the denomination is severely reduced. Paragraph 2553 allows for churches to disaffiliate from the UMC at the cost of two years of annual apportionments (what you would pay the denomination in the average year) and the estimated cost for the pensions of retired pastors. A fair estimate of the cost for our church would be somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 dollars, which is, frankly, a steal considering what you would pay for the church’s property otherwise. The Global Methodist Church does not require a trust clause, meaning that the building would remain owned by the congregation in perpetuity. Remaining with the UMC means there is no required cost to exit, but the UMC has no plans to remove the trust clause in the future.



FINANCES AND STAFFING



Let's open with staffing. Both organizations use a "sent" system where your clergy is sent to you by a bishop. The UMC has churches and clergy fill out profiles, the bishop matches people up during appointment season, and moves everyone to their new jobs all at once. Clergy are guaranteed appointments and churches are guaranteed pastors (if they can afford them). The speed and reliability of appointments is impressive. Some of the historic challenges of this model have been a lack of choice for churches and clergy alike and a relatively short average appointment length (4 years).

The GMC is hoping to tweak the process to create more choice for churches and to allow for longer appointments. They've guaranteed a longer period of consultation between the church and the bishop with more individual attention, and they've removed guaranteed appointments for clergy so that ineffective clergy are not passed around *and* multiple clergy may be hunting for appointments at once without the bishop racing against a clock to appoint them. All of that to say, the GMC appears to be trying to make good on its promise to give churches more input, but there's not as much information available on this process as one might hope just yet. While these tweaks do work towards more congregational choice, a full explanation of just how much choice there will be has not been drafted at this point.

Onward to finances! The UMC has a vast number of agencies to accomplish the work of the church. There are 15 mandated agencies in the UMC verses 4 in the GMC. Naturally, the UMC needs a bigger budget to afford to staff its agencies. The UMC calculates your apportionments (the amount you pay the UMC so they can afford their denominational overhead budget) using an unposted formula that usually equals something between 7% and 15%. That being said, there is no process for discipline if you do not pay your apportionments. It's generally considered to reflect poorly on the community and the pastor, but there's no consequence for not paying. It's not uncommon for churches to leave apportionments unpaid if they're not "in the black" in a given calendar year.

Larger churches especially are known for spending missionally with the hope that if they grow, they'll begin paying their apportionments. Certain churches do not pay at all if they're frustrated with the denomination, withholding apportionments until the denomination's position changes on certain issues.

The GMC has much lower overhead and only requires 6.5% of your budget in dues. There is an active expectation that churches will budget to ensure they can pay their apportionments. This is not to say that a church would immediately be in hot water if they missed a payment, but it does remove the possibility of churches trying to influence policy by withholding funds or treating apportionment costs as a luxury for good years. A church's costs are set in the GMC.

These two different processes are partially due to the way that the organizations create their budgets. The UMC designs a budget and sends out a bill to all of its churches. In this model, churches support a strong central institution. The GMC waits for its churches to send in their apportionments and then creates a budget based around how well things are going. Here, a leaner institution exists to support stronger churches.

PROCESSING TOGETHER

IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOUR CHURCH TO OWN ITS PROPERTY? WHY?

DO YOU THINK THE GMC'S CLERGY POLICIES ARE GOING TO HELP CLERGY APPOINTMENTS? OR IS THE UMC'S SYSTEM ALREADY IN A GOOD PLACE?

DO YOU MAKE REGULAR USE OF THE CHURCH AGENCIES? WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THEM? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU COULD DO BETTER LOCALLY?

CHALLENGES AHEAD!

As we wrap up, it's fair to say that these two organizations are in different parts of their life cycle and will have different struggles. The UMC has been around for a long time. They have a vast amount of resources and will likely retain a majority of congregations after this is over. Remember, if you don't choose to leave by the end of 2023, you're automatically UMC! That being said, the UMC is currently losing millions of members annually to old age, and studies by organizations like the Pew Research Center have repeatedly shown that the more progressive a church is, the faster it declines. Churches like the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ are both prime examples of struggling progressive churches that aren't able to find new converts to replace their aging congregations. As the UMC continues forward, they'll have to figure out how to avoid that fate and convert their abundant resources into congregants.

The GMC just launched. As evangelicals that believe that their message is needed by everyone, they're statistically more likely to experience church growth. The challenge for them will be resources. Leaving the UMC isn't free, and starting a new organization will be a challenge. It's certainly not impossible. The Presbyterian Church of America, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church in North America, and other evangelical split offs have all done well after church splits, but in the short-term, they'll have to figure out how to get access to resources to sustain a new movement and feed their growth.

SIMPLE COMPARISON CHART

<u>Doctrine Beliefs</u>	<u>Global Methodist Church</u>	<u>United Methodist Church</u>
	Traditional/Evangelical	Progressive
Scripture	Inerrant Word of God. Ultimate authority.	Historic writings that can inform how we think. Not binding.
Same-Sex Marriage	No. The Bible says not to.	Yes (within a few years). It's about justice.
Jesus	The savior that was born of a virgin, died for our sins, and is the only path to salvation	Radical teacher that wanted justice for the outcast. Possibly mythologized.
Religion	Primarily about truth. We should share that truth.	Primarily about morality. Many truths are valid.
Creeds/ Doctrine	Summaries of true belief. Pastors must uphold.	Historic foundations. Pastors may uphold.
Structure	More powerful congregations. Smaller overhead.	More powerful bishops. Bigger overhead.
Building	Owned by congregation	Owned by denomination
Dues	6.5% set rate	7-14% (on average)
Pastors	Clergy not guaranteed jobs. Slower hiring process. More congregational choice.	Clergy guaranteed jobs. Quick appointments. Bishop directs appointments.

TO READ BEFORE NEXT TIME:

With this being our final session before Q&A and a vote, PLEASE do your homework! These are four great articles about why people are choosing the GMC and why others are choosing the UMC.

"Ten Reasons I'll Join the Global Methodist Church," Jay Therrell

https://jaytherrell.com/ten-reasons-why-ill-join-the-global-methodist-church/?fbclid=IwAR1p9jmzIPq_Dpvtl6iCmz_ym2EcQoM5keesT9SEkK7smGZ9Oy0-EEmlh4g

"Why I Will Remain a United Methodist," Jack Harnish

<https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-future/why-i-will-remain-a-united-methodist/>

"I'm Going with the Global Methodist Church," JJ Mannschreck

<https://goodnewsmag.org/why-im-going-with-the-global-methodist-church/>

"Why Stay?" Stay UMC

<https://www.stayumc.com/about/>

CHECK-IN

There is one more Sunday of our discernment process, driven primarily by your questions. To help me understand where our community is at and what concerns you have, please take the time to fill out this little survey.

1) Are you a member of TPUMC?

YES NO

2) At this point in time, would you vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church?

YES NO UNDECIDED

3) At this point in time, would you vote to join the Global Methodist Church?

YES NO UNDECIDED

4) What factors have contributed to your current position?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am theologically conservative/evangelical | <input type="checkbox"/> I value institutional stability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am theologically progressive | <input type="checkbox"/> I want us to own our building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel strongly about same-sex marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> I want more choice in finding a pastor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am frustrated that the Book of Discipline is not currently enforced by bishops | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a strong preference for the UMC's name and logo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer a denomination with centralized power and more denominationally-affiliated agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer a denomination with greater missional autonomy for each church and a lower overhead cost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want to move on from the debate in the UMC and focus on making disciples | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

5) What questions do you still have?
