

# UNITED METHODISM

AND THE FUTURE:

FOLLOWING WHERE GOD LEADS US

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## United Methodism as we have known it has come apart.

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- Nearly 7,500 United Methodist congregations in the U.S. have disaffiliated, or separated, from the denomination. (Approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all UMC congregations in the U.S.) in the past 3 years.
- An unknown number (likely tens of thousands) of people have left United Methodist churches in the past 18 months from congregations which were unable to disaffiliate.
- Largest split within a mainline denomination in our lifetime.

# PURPOSE OF THIS PRESENTATION

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- Help us understand what has happened within the denomination and why it has happened.
- Help us understand how this affects our own annual conference (Eastern PA).
- Help us understand how the leadership of our own congregation has responded to this and how we intend to move forward.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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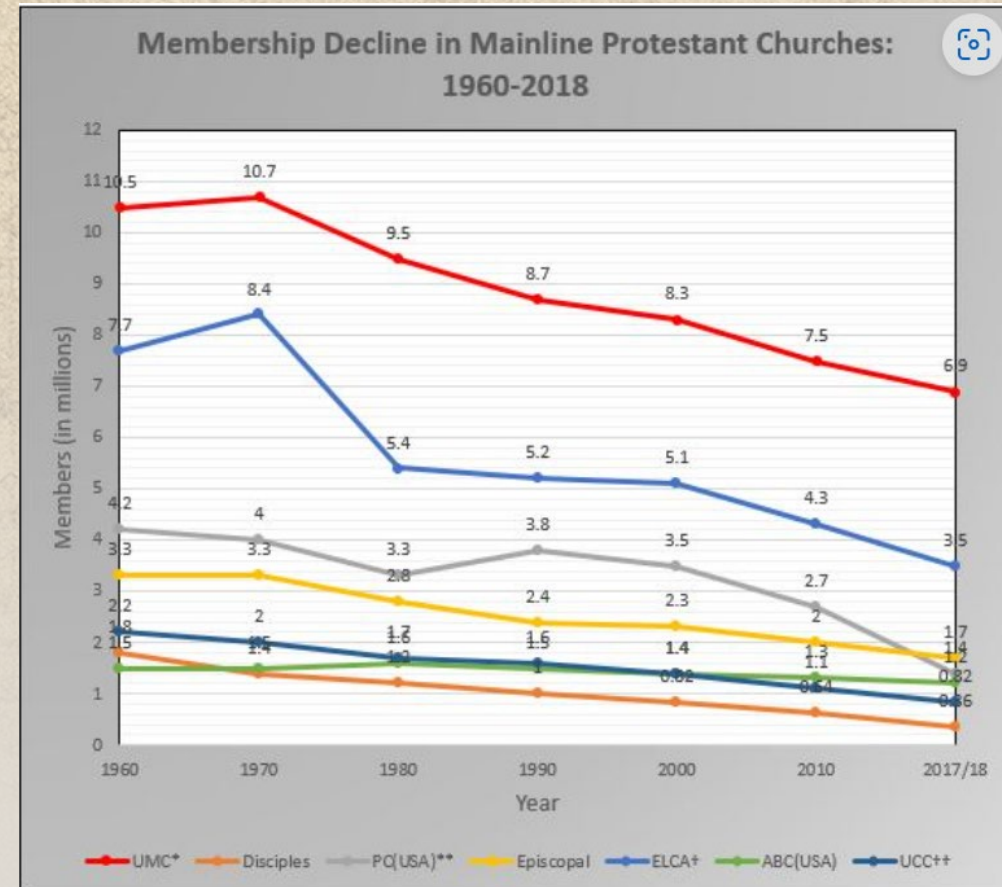
- Decades of numerical decline and disagreement over doctrine has led to 2 very different visions of the Christian faith within the UMC.
- This disagreement has been pulling the denomination apart for quite some time.
- The split is not unexpected.
- The split should not be surprising.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?



The “seven sisters” of mainline Protestantism:

- United Methodist Church
- Presbyterian Church USA
- Episcopal Church
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- American Baptist Church
- United Church of Christ



# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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- The UMC was founded in 1968.
  - Widening gulf between a classic, orthodox understanding of Christianity and a more progressive, theologically and socially, understanding of Christianity.
  - This divide pre-dates the founding of the UMC by several decades.
- Some Terms:
  - General Conference
  - Annual Conference
  - Charge Conference
  - Book of Discipline

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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- Disagreement has risen at the General Conferences over matters related to human sexuality, particularly homosexuality, since the first General Conference in 1972.
- Book of Discipline reads, in part, “We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.”
- Traditional definition of marriage has been affirmed at every GC since 1972.
- Denomination has been moving in a more traditional direction, mainly due to growth outside of the U.S.
- Efforts to change the definition of marriage and the understanding of the practice of homosexuality have been made at each General Conference since 1972.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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- After General Conference 2012, many progressives began to embark on a campaign of “civil disobedience,” going against the rules in the Book of Discipline.
- General Conference 2016
  - Things getting more serious – open schism was being talked about.
  - Council of Bishops appointed a Commission on a Way Forward.
    - Develop a plan that would help the church to move forward in peace rather than continue to argue and fight.
    - They developed 3 plans which would be presented at a called special General Conference in 2019, designated to specifically deal with this issue.



# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## General Conference 2019

- One Church Plan - This plan, preferred by a majority of the Council of Bishops, would remove restrictive language from the Book of Discipline that prohibits same-gender weddings in UMC properties and ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexuals.” It would add language to protect churches and pastors who choose not to allow same-gender marriages.
- Connectional Conference Plan - This plan would replace the current jurisdictional conferences with three connectional conferences based on affinity: Progressive, Traditional and Unity.
- Traditional Plan
  - Affirmed the historic teaching on human sexuality in the UMC.
  - Added accountability features for those who would defy the church’s teaching.
  - Added a paragraph allowing congregations to exit the denomination and take their property with them.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## Paragraph 2553

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.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## Paragraph 2553

- Suspended the Trust Clause of the UMC for a limited period of time.
- Required disaffiliating congregations to pay 2 years of apportionments (current and following year) as well as their share of unfunded pension liabilities.
- Congregations who voted to disaffiliate had to do so by a vote of 67% majority vote of members attending the charge conference meeting.
- Congregations would then have to be approved for disaffiliation by their respective annual conferences.
- Annual conferences had the option of adding procedural and financial requirements for congregations in their care.
- Provisions expire on December 31, 2023.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## General Conference 2019 Decision

- The Traditional Plan passed by a vote of 53% to 47% over the One Church Plan.
- Rather than bring the church together, the 2019 General Conference divided the church even further.
- There was open defiance and rebellion from many U.S. Annual Conferences and Bishops who had hoped that the One Church Plan would pass.
- In late 2019 a group was formed which produced the Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation.
  - Would allow congregations to exit gracefully, without undue process or financial penalty.
  - Was supported by progressives, conservatives and moderates alike.
  - Would support the launch of new Methodist denominations.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## The Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation

- The Protocol was supposed to be voted on at GC 2020, but then Covid happened.
- General Conference was delayed until 2022.
- During this time, the Wesleyan Covenant Association and others were laying the groundwork for a new traditional denomination.

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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## 2022 – A Year of Decisions

- The Council of Bishops decided to delay GC 2022 until 2024.
- Many of those backing the Protocol withdrew their support.
- Global Methodist Church officially launched in May of 2022.
- Many congregations realized that they needed to take advantage of the “exit ramp” granted by 2553 before the door closed at the end of 2023.
- Many Annual Conferences were not ready with processes and procedures for disaffiliation and had to throw things together quickly.
- Many congregations were pressured to make a decision about whether to pursue disaffiliation.
- Other congregations were totally unaware of what was going on and why.
- Because Annual Conferences could add requirements for disaffiliation, rules varied greatly from one Annual Conference to another.

# EASTERN PA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND CORNWALL

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- The EPA Annual Conference has had some of the most stringent and expensive requirements of any Annual Conference in the U.S. There were also a great deal of “unknowns” related to the process.
- In August of 2022, the Cornwall UMC Administrative Board considered whether or not to enter into the discernment process to consider disaffiliation that was required by the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.
  - Voted to enter into a process of considering disaffiliation but chose not to follow the Conference’s process.
  - Decided to engage the legal services of National Center of Life and Liberty (NCLL).
  - The intent of the effort was to secure a more fair set of terms from the EPA for disaffiliation.
  - This decision was NOT a decision to disaffiliate, but a decision to consider disaffiliation.

# EASTERN PA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND CORNWALL

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## EPA Route to Disaffiliation

- Only 5 churches in our area disaffiliated in 2023 using the EPA Conference process.
- 50 churches in the EPA are engaged in the litigation with NCLL to negotiate more favorable terms.
- Because we are engaged in litigation, the 2023 sunset paragraph does not apply to us.
- Litigation has moved very slowly, and it is unclear as to when this will be resolved.



## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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- God has called us to stand firm in our faith.
- God has called us to move forward in ministry.
- God has called us to put our future in His hands.

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