

Q&A



Questions Surrounding the Recent
Decision of the General Conference
and The Ruling of the Judicial Council

What happened in the church's deliberations regarding human sexuality?

In February, the United Methodist General Conference (the official body responsible for church governance) adopted what was called the "Traditionalist Plan."

That plan affirmed official exclusionary language and policies concerning LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church, and imposed severe penalties on Pastors who violated those policies (for example, by officiating same-sex weddings.)

The General Conference also enacted provisions to allow dissenting congregations or other United Methodist organizations to exit the denomination, as well as a petition that protects clergy pensions.

After the vote, the legislation was appealed to the Judicial Council, a nine-member body tasked with deciding whether proposed church legislation comports with the church's constitution and existing rules.

What is the Traditionalist Plan?

The Traditionalist Plan, which passed by a narrow majority at the most recent General Conference, affirms the church's current bans on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage.

If the Traditionalist Plan passed, does that mean things stay the same?

No. The plan makes significant changes to the United Methodist Book of Discipline, including imposing severe penalties on both pastors and congregations for any deviation. This could lead to additional mandatory penalties and church trials.

Which parts of the plan were rejected and which were approved?

The top court rejected legislation that would have:

- added accountability for bishops who did not enforce the church's rules:
- required denominational leaders to certify that they would abide by the rules:
- required a board of conduct "examination to ascertain whether an individual is a practicing homosexual."

However, several of the petitions were ruled constitutional and will be enacted:

- a more detailed definition on what it means to be a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual":
- added mandatory penalties for pastors who violate these rules:
- tightened policy around the commissioning of bishops and church trials.

The court also approved legislation that provides a way for churches who disagree with the denomination's stance to leave with their property.

Will we remain a reconciling congregation?

Yes. We remain committed to the belief in the sacred worth of ALL people.

Are we planning to leave the United Methodist denomination?

Throughout history, the UMC has split and come back together. Though we cannot predict what will unfold over the next few months, it is clear that some form of separation is imminent in the Church. We continue to work within our community and the Mountain Sky Conference to understand what form this will take.

In April, the St. Andrew Church Council established the Futures Strategy Task Force to help lead our planning. This group will gather input to create a strategic plan, which will then come before the Church Council and congregation for acceptance or revision.

The Futures Strategy Task Force's work will include research on the multiple times that the Church has split in the past, assessing our options, and proposing a working relationship with other like-minded congregations throughout the country. They will also ensure that our assets are protected and continue to be used in ministry. The Task Force is in close dialogue with the Mountain Sky Conference, Jurisdiction, and leadership throughout the country on the challenges in front of us.

Will we continue to provide financial support to the United Methodist Church?

Yes. More than 90% of those funds stay in the Mountain Sky Conference, and most of the funds that go beyond our region serve important work among like-minded Methodist organizations. For the time being, we feel that withholding our apportionment would only harm those who we are trying to help.

Can the UMC take our church property?

Loss of our church property is a very remote possibility. All United Methodist Church property is held in trust for the conference in which it's located, which in our case is the Mountain Sky Conference. The so-called "trust clause" exists so that in the event of a church closure, or a congregation being unable to meet it's bills over the long term, the property can be used to start or support new ministries in the Mountain Sky Conference.

Before such a decision can be made, there is a long process of evaluation, involving several conference level committees and a Mountain Sky Conference vote which requires a 2/3 majority, to close the church and repurpose the property.

Under even the simplest of scenarios, that process takes several years. None of those conditions apply here at St. Andrew: we are a thriving congregation doing strong ministry.

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Moreover, the Mountain Sky Conference leadership agrees with us about the importance of our commitment to inclusivity in all dimensions of church life.

Finally, an important part of the work of the Futures Strategy Task Force is to ensure that we will be able to protect our material assets and continue to use them in our ministry. The Task Force will be carefully reviewing our options and reporting back to the congregation. Any decision to exit the denomination would need to be approved by both Church Council and congregational votes.

The Judicial Council has determined that an exit must meet three minimum requirements:

- Approval of the disaffiliation resolution by a two-thirds majority of members of the church present and voting at the church conference.
- Establishment of the terms and conditions, including the effective date, of the agreement between the Mountain Sky Conference and the exiting local church by the conference board of trustees in accordance with applicable church law and civil laws.
- Ratification of the disaffiliation agreement by a simple majority of the members of the Mountain Sky Conference present and voting.

Can our clergy be punished for rejecting the decision of the GC?

Effective January 1, 2020, they may be. Penalties are a year's suspension without pay for first offense and termination of conference membership and church credentials for a second offense. Because of the steps necessary to impose those punishments, it's unlikely. But as a matter of Christian conscience, all of our clergy are deeply committed to including everyone in the life of the church and are willing to face whatever penalties may be imposed.

The Task Force is committed to finding answers and forming plans prior to when the new rules go into effect.

Does this go into effect immediately?

No. The current rules of the Book of Discipline stand until January 2020. We continue to be strongly committed to inclusion, opposition to the decision of the General Conference, and will continue our ministry as we have been.

In the meantime, The Futures Strategy Task Force will continue working to help St. Andrew discern the new thing to which God is calling us.

Can the recent decisions of the General Conference be overturned at the next General Conference in 2020?

While the mechanism exists within the United Methodist Church to overturn the decision through debate and voting, the conservative faction is growing in size and strength. It is likely that the church will become less inclusive as those in favor of full inclusion increasingly become the minority.

The Judicial Council nullified parts of the Traditionalist plan.

Are we still considering a separation?

Even if the entire Traditionalist Plan was deemed unconstitutional, it is clear that LGBTQ acceptance will continue to be a dividing issue within the church. We would rather seek a separation in order to fully live into our inclusive belief that God welcomes LGBTQ persons to participate in all aspects of life in the church.

Does St. Andrew have a plan?

We are working on it. St. Andrew will have a key voice in the conversation about what is next for those United Methodists now exiled by the decisions of General Conference. St. Andrew is the second largest Reconciling congregation in the denomination, and we will not accept the status quo. We will consider every option before us, including a gracious exit from the denomination. These conversations are already underway, and will likely last for months. Our Futures Strategy Task Force is working at the local and regional levels to discover our options and create alliances so that we can form the best possible plan for our future.

Are other churches looking to separate from the denomination and form something new?

Yes. While the Traditionalist Plan prevailed by a slim margin, many churches in the United States and Europe are dissatisfied with that outcome. Like-minded congregations are already exploring ways to band together, and our Futures Strategy Task Force will reach out to those congregations and groups.

I feel like I should be doing something. Is there any way I can get involved?

In the next few months there will be several opportunities to voice your opinion about the future of St. Andrew. Please look for our communications concerning congregational meetings, surveys, focus groups, and the like.

Most importantly, continue to be St. Andrew. Reach out to your neighbors and community with love. Commit anew to creating inclusive and welcoming space for everyone. Pray for and engage with the Futures Strategy Task Force.

Will the Task Force Meetings be open?

Unfortunately, no. Due to the tremendous amount of confidential legal, personnel, real estate, and financial matters we have to discuss it is in our best interest to limit the discussion to experts in those fields. We are committed to transparency and will make regular congregational updates on our progress, and meeting minutes will be available.

Will you consider additional members on the Task Force?

If you have particular expertise, we would love to have you be involved. Please talk to task force members with the expertise you can offer. We are trying to limit the size of the group for meetings while we also want to include broader expertise from the congregation.

What options for involvement are there outside of St. Andrew?

In our region, you can watch for upcoming alerts by registering for Conference updates through the Mountain Sky Conference.

Visit - www.mtnskyumc.org

If you'd like to be involved in the broader movement for inclusivity, you can also contact the Reconciling Ministries Network where you'll find updates, calls to action, and ways to get involved.

Visit - <https://rmnetwork.org>

How can I stay informed?

The Task Force will be providing regular updates to the congregation through Task Force meeting minutes (available in the front office), congregational input sessions, Rev. Mark's newsletter, and other forms of communication. Also, please register for the Mountain Sky webinars and virtual meetings.

As always, our Pastors' doors are open: if you have questions or would like to know more, please feel free to contact us.

"To Lead Boldly in Uncertain Times"

Tuesday, April 30 | 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Rev. Mark and Roxane White, our strategy consultant from the Futures Strategy Task Force, are conducting an online webinar for the Mountain Sky Conference focusing on leadership during times of crisis.

We encourage you to join us.

Register at:

rncumc-reg.brtapp.com/ToLeadBoldlyinUncertainTimes

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