

On Sunday evening, January 8, 2023, Rev. Dr. Tom Salsgiver met with the clergy and leaders from four United Methodist Churches in the Carlisle area. He has a long history with the UMC and currently serves as the Assistant to the Bishops of the Susquehanna Conference.

In his presentation, Dr. Salsgiver addressed topics including the Susquehanna Conference's current disaffiliation process, history of the debate within the UMC, and misconceptions and rumors that have caused confusion and misunderstanding among congregations. He shared the current plans for the 2024 General Conference to be held in Charlotte, NC, in which Delegates will vote on over 1,000 pieces of legislation. The information presented to our clergy and leaders will enable us to have more informed conversations and be better prepared for future developments within the UMC.

Below are minutes for the meeting as presented by Dr. Salsgiver. **Each church's leadership board will be discussing the presentation at upcoming monthly meetings, discerning if there are any next steps for their congregation, and sharing those details when available.**

No vote or official action is required for a United Methodist congregation at this time to remain United Methodist.

**UPDATE ON THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
With REV. DR. TOM SALSGIVER
January 8, 2023 at 6 PM at Carlisle UMC, Chapel
MINUTES OF MEETING**

Attendees included leaders and pastors from Carlisle UMC, Hickorytown UMC, Middlesex UMC, and Otterbein UMC. Among those in attendance were the following pastors and Admin/Leadership Council Chairs:

Church	Pastor	Admin/Leadership Council Chair
Carlisle UMC	Rev. Mira Hewlett Rev. Jacob Waybright	Michelle Williams
Hickorytown UMC		Anna Zeigler
Middlesex UMC	Rev. Rachel Wong	Mary Groshans
Otterbein UMC	Rev. Steve Salisbury	Steve Bear

The meeting was called to order by Rev. Mira Hewlett at 6:02 PM. Rev. Hewlett opened with prayer and then introduced Rev. Dr. Tom Salsgiver.

- I. Purpose of the Meeting
 - a. Dr. Salsgiver stated that the purpose of the meeting is to give a history of how the UMC got to this point, to discuss what we know and don't know, and to clarify rumors.
 - b. The purpose is not to have a theological discussion about homosexuality.
- II. About Dr. Salsgiver
 - a. Dr. Salsgiver has been Assistant to the Bishops of the Susquehanna Conference for six years. In this position, he works closely with our Bishops. One role is to act as liaison with the

- Conference Chancellor (licensed attorney and legal advisor to the Conference and Board of Trustees). He is also responsible for coordinating with churches in the Susquehanna Annual Conference regarding disaffiliation from the UMC.
- b. He serves as Jurisdictional Secretary for the Northeastern Jurisdiction. In this role, he communicates with the Bishops and leaders of the 10 Annual Conferences that compose the Northeast Jurisdiction of the UMC to help coordinate and organize their work. Ours is one of five U.S. Jurisdictional Conferences.
 - c. He has attended 5 General Conferences (legislative gatherings of the worldwide church) and five Jurisdictional Conferences.
 - d. He also serves as President of the UM Publishing House.

III. Purpose and History of General Conference

- a. Per the UM Book of Discipline, the General Conference meets every four years and is attended by lay and clergy delegates worldwide. The Book of Discipline can only be changed by action at General Conference following a petition and vote.
- b. The 1972 General Conference added to the Discipline that “Homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching”, which has been debated ever since.
- c. The debate has heated up in the last 12 years or so and especially once the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to allow same-gender marriage in 2015.
- d. Dr. Salsgiver attended the contentious 2016 General Conference. The feeling at this Conference was that the next motion to be made would be to split the UMC into two or more denominations. The Bishops at the Conference, who can preach and chair meetings but not make motions or decisions, were for the first time asked to help lead the way through this debate.
- e. The Commission on the Way Forward was formed, made up of 32 people worldwide with diverse understandings of human sexuality. Dr. Salsgiver took part in this Commission, along with three Bishops including Bishop Steiner Ball (one of our two current Bishops). The Commission’s task was to bring something to the next General Conference that would lead to a clear path forward.
- f. A special General Conference was held in 2019, only the second special General Conference ever convened. The other was in 1970 regarding the merger of the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Episcopal denominations into the United Methodist Church.
- g. The Commission on the Way Forward met for two years and brought three proposals to the 2019 General Conference.
- h. The 2019 General Conference met for four days and passed three amendments to the Book of Discipline. Dr. Salsgiver noted that these amendments are not in the latest published Book of Discipline (printed in 2016) but can be found online in the 2019 Addendum and Errata.
 - i. Pastor pensions were changed to take pressure off Annual Conferences.
 - ii. Statements about homosexuality were strengthened and tightened.
 - 1. Self-avowed LGBTQ persons or those married to the same gender cannot be ordained. Bishops may not ordain LGBTQ pastors, even if approved by Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session.
 - 2. Pastors may not marry same-gender couples.
 This was considered the Traditional Plan and passed 52% to 48%.
 - iii. Paragraph 2553 on Disaffiliation from the UMC was added. This was added, because without this paragraph, churches may only join another denomination that is in full communion with the UMC. General Conference has not yet given the Global Methodist Church full communion. (The Global Methodist Church is discussed below in the “Questions & Answers” section.)

There are two reasons to disaffiliate:

1. The local church disagrees with the Discipline as it relates to LGBTQ and human sexuality.
 2. The Annual Conference where a church resides has not been faithful to the Discipline, such as allowing pastors to marry same-gender or ordaining LGBTQ persons.
- i. Dr. Salsgiver shared that the Bishops of the Susquehanna Conference have publicly stated that they will follow the Discipline. Our Bishops do not say whether they agree or disagree but that they will be faithful to it. Other Annual Conferences and Jurisdictions have not followed the Discipline, such as the Western Jurisdiction that has elected and consecrated LGBTQ Bishops. A church's stated reason to disaffiliate according to Paragraph 2553 cannot be because of action in an Annual Conference to which a church does not belong.
 - j. The 2020 General Conference was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the pandemic continued into 2021 and 2022, a committee of 15 persons including 3 Bishops evaluated the possibility of holding the 2022 Conference by Zoom. They recommended against this due to the difficulty of scheduling meetings across 24 time zones, the lack of good Internet connection in certain parts of the world, and the difficulty of translating the 4 or 5 official languages spoken at General Conference over Zoom. It was also decided that talking about the future of the UMC should be done face-to-face. After the committee's recommendation, the General Conference was postponed to 2024. It will not be held in 2023 because there would have had to be another in 2024, per the Discipline.
 - k. Over 1,000 pieces of legislation are being considered for the 2024 General Conference. Only 30 of these have to do with human sexuality, though it's the only topic we hear about.

IV. Process of Disaffiliation

- a. The current Disaffiliation process will sunset on December 31, 2023. This date was set in 2019 based on the assumption that there would be a General Conference in 2020.
- b. General Conference specified the general parameters of the disaffiliation process, but Annual Conference Trustees determine the specifics of the process. At least one Annual Conference has paused the disaffiliation process, citing too much misinformation being circulated. The Susquehanna Conference has no plans to pause the disaffiliation process.
- c. **No vote is required for a church to remain with the UMC.** A vote is only required if a church chooses to pursue disaffiliation. Many churches are waiting to see what will happen at the 2024 General Conference.
- d. If a church decides to consider disaffiliation, Dr. Salsgiver will hold an informational meeting with the church's leadership to review the steps of disaffiliating.
- e. The church's leadership will then discuss with members and decide whether to hold a Church Conference to vote.
- f. A Church Conference allows any member of the church to vote. The vote is Yes or No to disaffiliate. The disaffiliation must receive 2/3 of the vote to move forward. If the result is Yes, the church will begin the process to disaffiliate. If the result is No, the discussion ends.
- g. Disaffiliations that receive 2/3 majority within a church must be voted on at Annual Conference. The next Susquehanna Annual Conference will be held May 18-20, 2023. Because this is the only Annual Conference session scheduled before the sunset of the current disaffiliation process, churches wishing to disaffiliate under the current process will need to be voted on at this Annual Conference. The church must produce a document stating the reasons for disaffiliation. Lay delegates and clergy do not vote on if they agree with the disaffiliation statement, only Yes or No to approve the disaffiliation.

- h. Jay Layman, Conference Chancellor and member of Carlisle UMC, believes that the Annual Conference vote was included in the process to protect historical UM church properties. Disaffiliations negotiated in good faith without evidence of intimidation and with a solid 2/3 majority at Church Conference are expected to be approved at Annual Conference.
- i. Financial considerations:
 - i. The disaffiliating church is responsible for 1% of the assessed value of its property as listed in the most recent year end statistical report.
 - ii. Shares of Ministry for 2020, 2021 and 2022 must be paid in full, plus two years based on 2023's amount.
 - iii. The church must pay its share of the unfunded pension liability. This amount is based on a formula that depends on Shares of Ministry and will fluctuate until the date of the vote to disaffiliate.
 - iv. The pastor's salary must be paid through June 30 and a parsonage provided.
 - v. Any debt to the Annual Conference must be paid in full.
 - 1. Church mortgages such as Carlisle UMC's which are financed through an external bank are not required to be paid off before disaffiliation.
- j. Jay Layman added that a disaffiliating church ends its relationship with the UMC either by following the process to dissolve its current corporate entity and creating a new corporation, or by amending the articles of incorporation to keep the existing entity and remove all references to "United Methodist". (They can use "Methodist" but not "United.")

V. Questions & Answers (asked throughout the meeting)

- a. Question: *Are churches that are disaffiliating right now not strictly following the Discipline (Paragraph 2553)?*
 Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Churches who disaffiliate must officially document their reasons for disaffiliating. In our Annual Conference some disaffiliating churches have stated that the Discipline has not gone far enough in strengthening language around homosexuality. Other churches have stated they can't live in the tension any longer.
- b. Question: *What percentage of churches have requested to disaffiliate?*
 i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: About 2,000 churches in the entire denomination have disaffiliated. Seven of the 830 churches in the Susquehanna Conference have disaffiliated as of Annual Conference 2022; all being smaller churches. The projection of total churches in our Annual Conference is about 10%, but there won't be an accurate count until Annual Conference.
- c. Question: *What is the Global Methodist Church?*
 i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: The Global Methodist Church (GMC) organized in May 2022. It was started by the Wesley Covenant Association and gained traction when the Western Jurisdiction and others strayed from the Discipline's statements about homosexuality. The GMC feels strongly that there should be no LGBTQ pastors and that same-gender couples shouldn't be married. They believe the UMC Discipline will change to allow this in the future, but that is not a certainty. In addition, the GMC has other differences with the UMC. For example, it doesn't believe in the life tenure of Bishops, and believes there should be fewer Bishops. Two UMC Bishops joined the GMC. Dr. Salsgiver recommends checking out the GMC's website for more information (www.globalmethodist.org)
 ii. Disaffiliating churches can choose to join the GMC. Disaffiliation from the UMC and affiliation with another denomination are separate decisions. Six of the seven churches in our Annual Conference who have disaffiliated have chosen to become independent.

- d. Question: *What is the cost of disaffiliation?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: It depends on the Annual Conference and is subject to change. Paragraph 2553 in the Discipline specifies certain financial parameters around disaffiliation, but the Annual Conference Board of Trustees determines the details around those parameters. The Susquehanna Conference Board of Trustees set parameters in the beginning that have since changed, and it's unknown if they may change them at some point in the future. The current financial cost with the Susquehanna Conference is summarized in the "Process of Disaffiliation" section above.
- e. Question: *If a church decides to disaffiliate, will they be able to rejoin the UMC?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: We don't know but need to begin thinking about this situation. One complication is the Trust Clause, which was instituted by John Wesley and says that a church does not ultimately own its property; it is held in trust for the denomination. If a church leaves and wants to come back, how does this impact the Trust Clause? (In 1979, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld the Trust Clause by ruling that a church in Western PA did not own their building when they left the UMC.)
- f. Question: *Did any churches disaffiliate over racial issues 30 years ago?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: No they did not disaffiliate but some chose to close their doors. And there are still churches today that refuse to accept female pastors.
- g. Question: *Where are the rumors coming from?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Those forming a new denomination want to get as many churches and pastors as possible to join them.
- h. Question: *Are the disaffiliating churches following the required process?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: They have to follow the process, or they can't disaffiliate.
- i. Question: *Have there been churches in our Annual Conference where the pastor left with the church?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Of the 7 that voted to leave, 6 did not have their pastor go with them – the 7th one did.
- j. Question: *In the seven disaffiliating churches in our Conference, did all members leave the UMC? What happens to membership in churches that chose to disaffiliate?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Several members wanted to stay UM. Our Annual Conference Care Team is working to identify and work with people whose church has disaffiliated but who wish to remain United Methodist. The goal is to connect them with other UM churches in the area.
 - ii. Original paperwork for membership records, weddings, baptisms, and deaths will go to the Annual Conference upon disaffiliation. The church can keep copies.
- k. Question: *Does any money already established by the disaffiliating church go to the Conference?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: No, their money goes with them after the financial requirements have been fulfilled.
- l. Question: *How does disaffiliation affect endowments?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Endowments and deeds will be handled according to their specific wording. They need to be checked for a reversionary clause stating the gift is provisional based on the UM church remaining a UM church. The Annual Conference needs copies of endowments.
- m. Question: *What is the view on Reconciling churches?*
- i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: The two Reconciling churches in our Conference have chosen not to disaffiliate.

- n. Question: *Did all seven churches in our Conference leave for the same reason?*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: The stated purpose of all seven churches was around homosexuality.
- o. Question: *What might a vote at General Conference look like around these topics? What options will they have?*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: Votes at General Conference are either Yes or No. Legislation used to be brought to a committee which would determine if it should go to the floor for a vote, but now every piece of legislation receives a vote. Amendments can be made to the petitions.

VI. Rumors & Responses (addressed throughout the meeting)

- a. Rumor: *If the 2024 General Conference amends the Book of Discipline to allow churches to decide for themselves to allow same-gender weddings, pastors will be required to perform these weddings.*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: If such an amendment happens, pastors will also be able to decide whether or not to perform same-gender weddings, just as they can now with heterosexual couples. A church would not be able to make its pastor perform same-gender weddings, and likewise a pastor would not be able to prevent the church from hosting a same-gender wedding.
- b. Rumor: *If a church doesn't disaffiliate now, it could have a gay pastor appointed.*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: In the Susquehanna Annual Conference the Discipline is being followed, and there are no 'self-avowed practicing homosexuals' (language in the Discipline) currently serving as pastors who could be appointed.
- c. Rumor: *The 'Powers That Be' did not allow General Conference in 2022 because they are hoping for more liberal delegates in 2024.*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: This does not match the facts. Since the Judicial Council ruled that the 2024 is a postponed Conference and not a new Conference, delegates who were elected in 2020 will be moved to 2024. The planned legislation for 2020 will also be moved to 2024, with additions accepted.
- d. Rumor: *The next General Conference will rewrite the Book of Discipline to say that the UMC doesn't believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity, or the Resurrection.*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: The belief in Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the Resurrection are contained in the Articles of Religion, which have been in place since John Wesley's time. To amend the Articles of Religion requires a passing vote of 2/3 of all delegates at General Conference, followed by a Constitutional amendment to be voted on by all Conferences in the world. Passing such an amendment would not be easily done. Our core doctrinal beliefs are not changing.
- e. Rumor: *Our church must hold a vote on this issue.*
 - i. Response by Dr. Salsgiver: **If your church chooses to remain UMC, you do not need a vote.** A vote is only needed if a church decides to pursue disaffiliation.

VII. Closing Thoughts and Next Steps

- a. Dr. Salsgiver recommended the United Methodist News Service. www.umnews.org as a source for fair news on this topic. Both sides are represented fairly.
- b. Rev. Hewlett noted that minutes from the meeting will be shared with all churches in attendance, along with a letter for Carlisle, Middlesex and Otterbein UMC to share with their congregations to distribute consistent information following this meeting.

The meeting was closed with prayer by Rev. Steve Salisbury at 7:38 PM