



BETHANY

**Town Hall Meeting**

July 18, 2021

# Defining Bethany Church

## Bethany Church Mission:

To *Love, Obey, and Proclaim* Jesus Christ

## Bethany Church Vision Statement:

To be a *faith community* that is *passionate* about living into the *fullness* of Jesus Christ

## Bethany Church Value Statement:

Bethany Church is a *Gospel-centric, Family-oriented* faith community committed to *Outreach & Discipleship*

## Bethany Church Believes:

The word of God is *inerrant* and *relevant* to all today

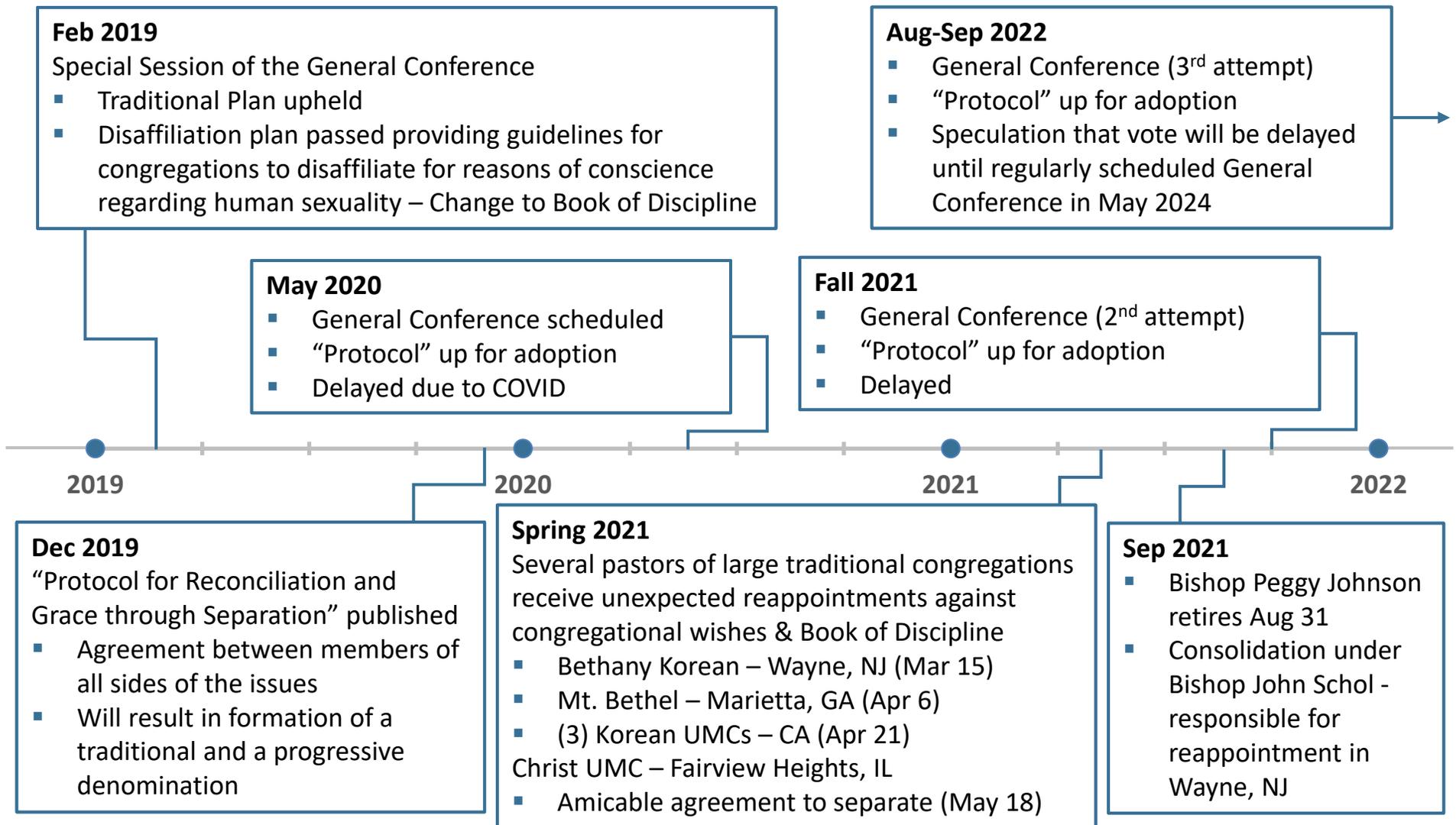
Bethany Church is NOT Changing

# State of the Union

- History
  - 1968 to Present
  - Conflict regarding the authority and interpretation of the Bible
  - Conflict over the Church's doctrines and ethics
  - The thought of amicable separation in 2004
  - 2019 General Conference narrowly upheld the Traditional Plan (53%)
- Book of Discipline not being followed – failure of leadership in the church is allowing this to happen through lack of consequences and lack of accountability
- Definition of terms:
  - What does it mean to be a traditional/orthodox church?
  - Independent – Non-Denominational
  - Inerrancy / Authority
  - WCA = Wesley Covenant Association
  - GMC = Global Methodist Church
  - General Conference vs. Special Conference vs. Annual Conference
- Scripture
  - Inerrant / Authoritative

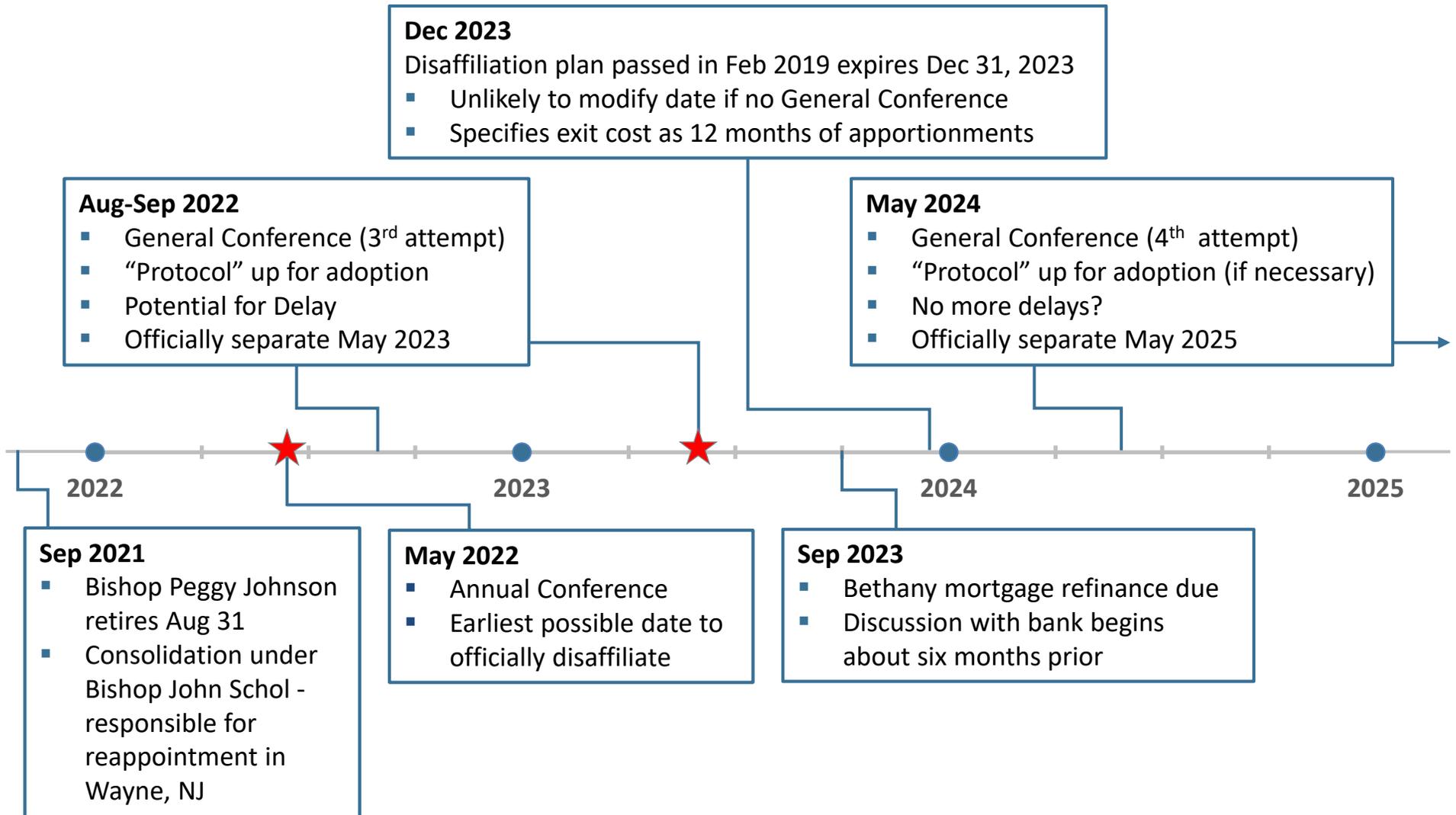
**The United Methodist denomination is on an inevitable path to splitting**

# Recent Developments within the UMC Denomination



**Bethany Church will have to vote on where to align – Either now or sometime soon**

# Key Dates Coming Up



Separation beyond 2022 provides additional obstacles and added costs

# Possible Paths Forward

	Assuming General Conference Held in Aug-Sep 2022	
	Separate through disaffiliation (May 2022)	Separate under "Protocol" (May 2023)
Notification to District Superintendent & Bishop	Sent <u>Oct 2021</u>	Several months after <u>Sep 2022</u>
Church Conference for congregational vote	Feb-Mar 2022	Approximately 4 months after notification to Bishop
Congregational <u>Vote #1</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Do not separate as this time (Default)</li> <li>2) Separate at this time</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Align with post-separation United Methodist Church (progressive) (Default)</li> <li>2) Align with Global Methodist Church (traditional)</li> <li>3) Become an independent congregation</li> </ol>
Congregational <u>Vote #2</u> after "Protocol" passes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Remain independent (Default)</li> <li>2) Join Global Methodist Church</li> </ol>	N/A
Date separation would be "official"	<u>May 2022</u> approval at Annual Conference	<u>May 2023</u> approval at Annual Conference
Separation Costs	Current on Apportionments plus 12 months (up front) (Effectively ends May 2023) ← <b>SAME</b> → Pay share of underfunded pension liability	Current on Apportionments (Effectively ends May 2023) Pay share of underfunded pension liability
Risks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Independent status for unknown length of time</li> <li>2) Potential higher costs if done in a later year</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Delay in passage of "Protocol"</li> <li>2) Bishop could decide to reappoint our pastor(s)</li> </ol>

The path will be chosen by the members of Bethany (2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote to separate)

# Financial Considerations

## Cash

- Ended last three years with over \$600k in unrestricted cash
- Univest wants to see minimum \$200k
- Goal of 3-6 months of non-financing expenses in our operating account (\$285k-\$570k)

Bank Account Balances	December Year-to-Date		
	2019	2020	Change
Embassy Bank - Operating Account	388,132	426,882	38,750
Univest Bank & Trust Company	217,765	201,347	(16,418)
<b>Unrestricted Cash Balance</b>	<b>605,897</b>	<b>628,229</b>	<b>22,332</b>

## Apportionments

- Current rate of \$149k per year to cover conference expenses
- Bethany fell behind starting in mid 2019 (treated as the first expense to cut)
- Needed December year-end giving in each year since in order to have enough cash from operations
- We will be completely caught up by January 2022 without unrestricted cash falling below \$600k

## Costs of Separation

- Starting point for negotiation is current on apportionments plus 12 months
  - Worse case result of ~\$150k coming out of >\$600k in unrestricted cash
- Pay share of underfunded pension liability (amount TBD) from unrestricted cash
  - This will be due regardless of disaffiliation or leaving under "Protocol"
- If Bethany becomes independent, savings of ~\$150k per year
- **No impact to funding of ministries at Bethany under any scenario due to separation costs**

**Bethany has the ability to pay any separation costs in full TODAY**

# Building Considerations

## Mortgage

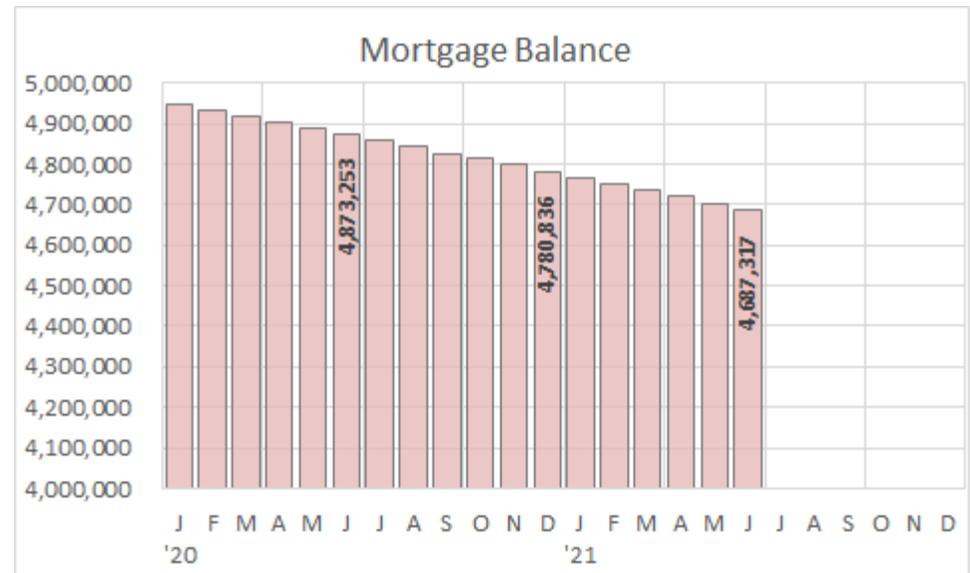
- Current balance of under \$4.7M
- Balloon payment due September 2023 – requires refinancing with 6-month lead time
- Macungie deed specifies the property is owned by the Eastern Conference of the United Methodist Church
- Our conference must approve any refinancing

## Impact of Separation

- Bethany keeps buildings and debt
- Remove risk of Conference choosing not to cooperate with refinance or sale
- Univest Bank states there will be no impact to Bethany's credit worthiness as current loan is to the congregation of Bethany Church

## Next Step is to right-size our buildings & debt

- Currently 24% of annual giving goes to mortgage payments
- Uncertainty around our post-COVID, post-separation congregation size
- Significant flexibility to better match our campus footprint to our future congregation size



Bethany has flexibility to right-size our buildings & debt for our post-separation size

# Commentary from Church Leadership

- Why Now ?
  - Recent developments & Bethany's own timing considerations change the risk/benefit of waiting
  - Additional obstacles and higher costs the longer it takes to pass the "Protocol"
- Bethany is not in a position to experience another change in pastor at this time
- We want to thoroughly educate the congregation and address concerns – not be forced to respond in crisis mode (Mt. Bethel example)
- Bethany can cover any separation costs
- Post-separation size is a critical factor to right-sizing our buildings; need clarity as soon as we can
- Bethany Church believes in the inerrant word of God, and we should be excited to take a cohesive & united stand for what is right

*"To the angel of the church of Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth".*  
*Revelation 3:14-16*

- Pray for discernment and unity as we move together through this season of change

**Church Leadership recommends Bethany start the process of separation now**

# Next Steps in This Journey

## Rollout of Information and Gathering of Feedback

- Town Hall – Materials made available afterwards on the Bethany App
- Outreach and phone tree to reach membership one-on-one
- Survey to capture anonymous questions/concerns
- Compile & synthesize feedback
- Additional communication or town hall meeting as necessary to address feedback concerns
- Share conclusions during regular worship service and define what comes next

## Leadership's Responsibility

- Provide all relevant information electronically to everyone in the Bethany family
  - Paper copies available upon request – contact the church office
- Seek to hear and understand questions and feedback - distribute additional clarity as needed
- Foster broad-based engagement from the congregation
- Act upon the direction set by the members of Bethany

## Your Responsibility

- Prayerfully consider what is God's path forward for Bethany Church
- Actively discuss with other Bethany stakeholders and be respectful of differing opinions
- Provide feedback through the channels provided – even if you feel you have nothing new to add
- Members should make every effort to attend and vote at Church Conference – even if you think the outcome is a foregone conclusion
- Stand united with your Bethany family throughout this period of change

**Make your voice at Bethany heard**

# Bethany's Strategic Direction Team

## Team Members:

Dave Alderson (Lead Pastor)

Steve Skekel (Associate Pastor)

Denny Farkas (Committee Chairperson)

Mike Witmer (Finance Chairperson)

Gary Speth (Trustees Chairperson)

Jack Payne (Finance team)

Tom Alderfer (Finance team)

Please direct questions to the team members or to the church office

# FAQ

**Q: How is Bethany's theological interpretation of the Bible different from the progressive movement within the United Methodist denomination?**

A: Affirming inerrancy today can be tricky. There are some, for example, who affirm Scripture's inspiration but reject its inerrancy. This limited inerrancy view sounds, at first glance, evangelical: "I believe Scripture is true in its message of faith." But on further investigation, this position denies Scripture is true in all that it asserts. Yes, it is true in its gospel message, but beyond that it may err in its specifics. Bethany Church holds the position of sola scriptura (Scripture Alone), as if Scripture is still the final authority.

**Q: What is Bethany's view on human sexuality, same sex marriages & LGBTQ clergy?**

A: We fully endorse the United Methodist Church's established position, ". . . that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God." The United Methodist Church "does not condone the practice of homosexuality, and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. . . We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." Our view is that it is the duty of all bishops of the United Methodist Church to endorse that same position, consistent with the Book of Discipline.

**Q: What is the difference between General Conference, Annual Conference, etc.?**

A: Church Conference is a meeting for the local congregation. Only church members can vote at a church conference. A church conference is held when necessary.

Charge Conference is also for the local congregation. All are welcome to attend but only church council and ordained staff can vote. This is typically held annually to approve administrative matters.

Annual Conference is a group of many congregations. Bethany is one of many churches in the Eastern PA Annual Conference. Approval of any congregation leaving the Annual Conference is part of an annual meeting in May.

General Conference is the global meeting for the denomination. The Eastern PA Annual Conference is one of many annual conferences that belong to the general conference. A global meeting is held every four years along with special secessions when deemed necessary.

# FAQ

**Q: What is the difference between the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) and the Global Methodist Church?**

*A: Upon adoption of the “Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation” (the “Protocol”), by the General Conference, the existing United Methodist Church will split into the post-separation United Methodist Church (progressive/liberal) and the Global Methodist Church (traditional/conservative). The WCA was formed out of disagreement with the progressive movement within the Methodist Church and seeks to connect like-minded traditional churches. WCA members played important roles in defining the “Protocol” and defining administration of the future Global Methodist Church. The WCA works to bring the Global Methodist Church to fruition; the WCA itself is not a church.*

**Q: Who decides if Bethany is to leave the United Methodist denomination? Will Bethany be an independent, stand-alone congregation? And if so, for how long?**

*A: Voting members of Bethany Church must approve by 2/3<sup>rd</sup> votes to separate from the denomination. If Bethany waits for the “Protocol” to pass, the members must vote on one of three paths: 1) to remain in the progressive denomination (post-separation United Methodist Church), 2) to separate to join the traditional denomination (Global Methodist Church) or 3) to separate to become an independent congregation. Bethany’s Church Council recommends that Bethany separate from the denomination now (potentially 1 to 3 years before the “Protocol” is passed) and become an independent congregation. Once the “Protocol” is adopted and the Global Methodist Church is formed, Church Council recommends that Bethany vote to either remain independent or to join this traditional denomination. Under this path, Bethany Church members must vote twice; once to become an independent congregation and then a second time to join the Global Methodist Church. The second vote is beyond the scope of this communication. A similar process of educating the congregation and voting will occur after the Global Methodist Church is formed and leadership has more clarity on the pros and cons of each path. Instead of one vote with three choices, there will be two votes with only two choices each time. Bethany would be an independent congregation for whatever time exists between the first and second vote.*

**Q: How will Bethany Church govern if Bethany is an independent congregation? How will pastors be vetted or appointed?**

*A: Bethany Church will continue to govern under the Book of Discipline last revised at 2019 General Conference. Bethany Church will continue to do so until Bethany's members approve joining the Global Methodist Church. If Bethany votes to remain independent after the formation of the Global Methodist Church, this will have to be revisited. It is the intention of lay leadership and staff that Bethany have consistent pastoral leadership through the next three or more years until the formation of the Global Methodist Church. Governance and pastoral appointments within the Global Methodist Church are expected to be very similar to what we have today.*

# FAQ

**Q: What are the steps of the disaffiliation process?**

*A: We begin with notification to and acknowledgement from the Bishop to disaffiliate. This begins a clear process as outlined in the Book of Discipline, which includes a church conference. The decision to disaffiliate must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the professing members of the local church **present** at the church conference. If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation will be negotiated by Bethany Church with the board of trustees of our Annual Conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. These terms will include the payment of any unpaid apportionments prior to disaffiliation and an additional 12 months of apportionments and pension liabilities as determined by the Annual Conference.*

**Q: By when could the disaffiliation process be completed?**

*A: There is a clear provision in our denomination's governing rules that spells out the process for disaffiliation. We believe this process could be accomplished in a matter of months if the Bishop and the Annual Conference are willing to enter into an amicable and orderly disaffiliation. The disaffiliation would become official at May 2022 Annual Conference.*

**Q: Will Bethany Church be allowed to keep its property after the disaffiliation process is completed? Is this any different if Bethany joins the Global Methodist Church?**

*A: Under the disaffiliation process outlined in the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, the disaffiliating church exits the denomination with its buildings, real estate, debt and assets free from the trust clause of The United Methodist Church. Our buildings, real estate, debt and assets will also stay with Bethany congregation if Bethany joins the Global Methodist Church. It is still to be determined if our property and debt will be held in trust by the new Global Methodist Church, but it is believed to be unlikely.*

# FAQ

**Q: Why have conference support dollars declined? Is Bethany Church not paying all that is due?**

*A: Apportionments are monthly charges from the Eastern PA Annual Conference to cover the administrative, ministry and personnel costs of the Annual Conference. Each congregation pays a share of the costs as a rate multiplied by the congregation's average of the last three years of expenses. For 2021, Bethany will be billed a total of \$149,298. This amount is down from a high of \$263,763 billed in 2018.*

*Bethany fell behind in making apportionment payments in the middle of 2019. Our level of giving no longer supported our level of expenses and apportionment payments were the first costs to defer. In both 2019 and 2020, Bethany could not pay monthly apportionment expenses in full based on January to November giving. It was with extraordinary December giving in both years, that Bethany was able to catch-up. This trend is continuing in 2021 with giving and expenses through June 30. We expect to fully close the gap with December giving.*

*Monthly financial information is posted on the Bethany website at [bethanyumchurch.com/give](http://bethanyumchurch.com/give). Yes, recent months show \$0 of Conference Support expense. It is important to also view the most recent December statement which contains full-year 2019 and full-year 2020 financial figures. Transfers To/(From) Reserve were made in December of both years to fully fund the amount owed. If Bethany can pay in full each month without cash going below the beginning of year level, the cash is remitted to our Conference and shown on the line for Conference Support. Lump-sum catch-up amounts are made when possible and charged to Reserve and then remitted to the Conference over 12 months. Bethany is paid in full through December 2019 and will be paid in full through December 2020 by December 2021. We expect to need until the end of December 2021 to have the cash necessary to pay 2021 charges in full. At this time, we intend to remit the cash in January 2022 for all of calendar year 2021 charges. At that time, Bethany will be 100% caught up and unrestricted cash is expected to remain above \$600k.*

**Q: Should I continue to give if Bethany enters a disaffiliation process?**

*A: Ministry at Bethany Church will not stop during a disaffiliation process. Our expenses for staff, ministries, missions, buildings and apportionments will not change during the possible transition. We continue to need your gifts to continue the work the Lord has called us to do. We urge you to continue to be faithful to God with your treasure and continue your generous giving toward ongoing transformational ministry during this potential period of transition.*

# Additional Resources

## HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION

- THE UN-TYING OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/the-un-tying-of-the-united-methodist-church-part-1>  
<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/the-un-tying-of-the-united-methodist-church-part-2>  
<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/the-un-tying-of-the-united-methodist-church-part-3>
- WHY IS THE METHODIST CHURCH REALLY SPLITTING – A HISTORY  
<https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/01/21/why-united-methodist-church-splitting/>
- ARE TRADITIONALISTS LEAVING THE METHODIST CHURCH  
<https://goodnewsmag.org/2020/01/are-traditionalists-leaving-the-united-methodist-church/>

## MOVEMENT OF TRADITIONAL PASTORS

- SUMMARY ARTICLE ON PASTORS IN THREE CONFERENCES BEING MOVED TO ANOTHER APPOINTMENT  
<https://goodnewsmag.org/2021/04/244329/>
- CALIFORNIA-PACIFIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE CHURCHES CALL FOR INTERVENTION  
<https://goodnewsmag.org/2021/06/244568/>
- MT BETHEL HIRES BACK PASTOR AS CEO  
<https://religionnews.com/2021/04/26/prominent-atlanta-area-church-leaves-united-methodist-church-over-pastors-reassignment/>
- REV LEE IN WAYNE, NEW JERSEY REAPPOINTMENT  
<https://goodnewsmag.org/2021/04/turmoil-in-new-jersey/>
- BISHOP SCHOL RESPONSE TO ARTICLE ON REV LEE  
[https://www.gnjumc.org/news/message-from-bishop-schol-about-appointments/?mkt\\_tok=MDc4LUUpYUS02NDMAAAF9IFwB1Fxic5CqSylGc-adIFBI8gzJmBCblLz5\\_H\\_s53Hd\\_BpMWN-GxyT6Ing5MmmAJvc51P8dX\\_TRs9vKTf\\_HXFnVDaAXIEevtp\\_kZb5LSaxZQ](https://www.gnjumc.org/news/message-from-bishop-schol-about-appointments/?mkt_tok=MDc4LUUpYUS02NDMAAAF9IFwB1Fxic5CqSylGc-adIFBI8gzJmBCblLz5_H_s53Hd_BpMWN-GxyT6Ing5MmmAJvc51P8dX_TRs9vKTf_HXFnVDaAXIEevtp_kZb5LSaxZQ)
- REV LEE RESPONDS TO BISHOP SCHOL  
<https://goodnewsmag.org/2021/05/new-jersey-korean-pastor-responds/>

# Additional Resources

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## PROCESS OF SEPARATION

- RECONCILIATION AND GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION  
<https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation>
- PROTOCOL  
<https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/the-agreement>
- PROTOCOL FAQ  
<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocol-of-reconciliation-and-grace-through-separation-faq>
- THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE (2016 VERSION)  
<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxvYXNpc3VtYzMxNnxneDo2YTAxNTViYjU4ZmVlYm1>
- ¶2553 IN BOOK OF DISCIPLINE ON SEPARATION (ADDED 2019)  
<https://www.wnccumc.org/files/content/departments/ministerial+services/ac+2020/disaffiliating+churches/paragraph+2553.pdf>
- JUDICIAL CONFERENCE RULING ON VALIDITY OF ¶ 2553  
[https://b65de766771c0b853a36-be165dca3b4cdda77f8dc2ad6b17900c.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/d/0e8773135\\_1558361726](https://b65de766771c0b853a36-be165dca3b4cdda77f8dc2ad6b17900c.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/d/0e8773135_1558361726)
- THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH  
<https://www.globalmethodist.org/>
- LEGAL OPINION ON SEPARATION AND WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS TO DO NOW  
<https://www.daltonmich.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UnitedMethodistSeparationGuideEBook.pdf>

## WHAT HAPPENS TO PROPERTY HELD IN TRUST

- TRUST CLAUSE  
<https://timothytennent.com/2021/04/27/the-trust-clause-in-the-united-methodist-church/>
- CAN CHURCHES LEAVE WITH THEIR PROPERTY?  
<https://wesleyan covenant.org/2019/05/02/can-churches-depart-the-united-methodist-church-with-their-property/>