

DISAFFILIATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs were prepared by the Servants with input from the Burnt Factory United Methodist Church (BFUMC) Church Council and Pastor Steve. We welcome all questions and will update the FAQs as the process moves forward.

Please send any questions you may have to
Angela Hart at Ang.Leigh.Hart@gmail.com

WHO ARE THE SERVANTS AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE IN THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?

The Servants are five volunteers — Judy McIntire, Angela Hart, Angie Wiseman, Mark Duvall and Tom Miiller — who are responsible for helping BFUMC work through the disaffiliation process so as to minimize distractions for the rest of the Church. The name “Servants” was chosen to remind us to be humble in our service to the Lord, the Church Council, Pastor Steve and you.

Servants are responsible for addressing the many issues related to disaffiliation and sharing that work with the Council, Pastor Steve and congregation. Servants, through a designated Point of Contact, communicate with and provide notices to the District Superintendent.

Servants have two paramount responsibilities:

- To be as impartial, objective, transparent and informative as possible throughout the disaffiliation process so that the professing membership can make the best, fully informed decision on whether to disaffiliate or remain United Methodist.
- To do everything ethically appropriate to preserve and protect the God-blessed community that is the Burnt Factory family. *Our purpose is to seek God’s will.* Burnt Factory is a special faith community that is needed in a world more and more typified by division and hatred. We must not allow this one issue to undermine Burnt Factory’s mission and commitment to serve our Lord Jesus Christ in the unity of the Spirit.

A REQUEST TO THE MEMBERS OF BURNT FACTORY

Please remember our purpose is to seek God’s will and keep Burnt Factory united. Please consider the following suggestions during this time:

- A. First and foremost, discuss your questions, opinions and feelings with the Lord. Your decision on these issues is between you and the Lord and no one else. When the 30-day period of prayer is over, keep praying.
- B. Continue to respect your Burnt Factory family members and believe that they hold their positions in good faith, even if you disagree.
- C. Remain civil; treat all people with respect and be open to hearing their positions so that God’s will is done. None of us have the right to judge another’s soul. A person’s moral standing is much more complex than one issue and is between them and the Lord, exclusively.

- D. Ask the Lord to open your heart to the feelings of people with whom you disagree. You may never agree with them, but you will be enlightened if you better understand them.
- E. Open communication is encouraged. Emails are strongly discouraged. The written word has so much power to do damage. If you send an email, you never know where your words might end up, how much it might hurt someone or how poorly it may reflect upon you. We are Christians, protect one another.
- F. Burnt Factory is much greater than this one issue. Never forget that. Burnt Factory must remain a beacon of the Lord's Word and remain the Lord's hands and feet in the service of those that live without the Lord's light or are suffering in this harsh world. If this one issue changes that, the Great Deceiver has won; *it* is the true and only enemy here.

MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS DISAFFILIATION?

The Book of Discipline (BoD) forbids United Methodist Church (UMC) pastors from marrying same-sex couples and the UMC from ordaining practicing, self-avowed homosexuals (“humans sexuality issues”). Disaffiliation (BoD, Paragraph 2553) is a process enacted at the 2019 General Conference that enables a UMC-affiliated local church that disagrees with the UMC position on human sexuality issues to leave the UMC while retaining its property. Currently, all of BFUMC’s real and personal property is held by the UMC in accordance with a UMC-wide trust clause.

Key takeaways: churches that are disaffiliating at present are doing so because they disagree with the potential changes of the BoD to permit same-sex marriages in United Methodist churches and the ordination of practicing, self-avowed homosexuals as United Methodist pastors.

- “Progressives” refers to some individuals that tend to advocate to change the BoD to permit same-sex marriage and ordination of practicing, self-avowed homosexuals.
- “Traditionalists” refers to some individuals that tend to advocate to not support a change to the BoD to permit same-sex marriages in UMC churches and the ordination of practicing, self-avowed homosexual pastors.

2. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

This has been covered by Pastor Steve in a Town Hall that can be viewed on the Burnt Factory website <https://youtu.be/S5PxAtdMsjo>.

3. WHY DO DISAFFILIATING TRADITIONAL CHURCHES BELIEVE THAT BoD LANGUAGE CHANGES REGARDING HUMAN SEXUALITY WILL BE APPROVED AT THE 2024 GENERAL CONFERENCE?

Since 2019, there have been significant changes within the makeup of the U.S. Episcopacy (Bishops) and the voting population (i.e., delegates) that will attend the 2024 General Conference. The margin of

progressively-minded delegates over traditionally-minded delegates has grown substantially. For example, 20 out of 46 UMC Bishops retired or resigned between 2020 and 2022. They were replaced in November 2022 by 13 new Bishops that support the change to the BoD human sexuality language. (The total number of US Bishops is now 39, down from 46 in 2019).

Because the international delegates' votes against BoD changes made the difference at the 2019 General Conference, the possible exclusion of these votes in the U.S. region because of potential changes that would allow U.S. conferences to act independently from the rest of the world connection strongly increases the likelihood that the BoD will be changed to permit same-sex marriages and ordination of practicing, self-avowed homosexuals in the U.S.

4. WHY DISAFFILIATE NOW INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE 2024 GENERAL CONFERENCE?

Even though nothing has yet been changed and cannot be changed until the 2024 General Conference, there are serious considerations related to postponing such a decision. Since the 2019 General Conference, the human sexuality issue has fueled increased division, hard feelings and expensive court battles within the UMC, creating anxiety for all churches. Paragraph 2553, which enables disaffiliation, expires at the end of 2023. There cannot be an extension of Paragraph 2553 (as currently written) because it expires December 31, 2023; thus, new legislation is necessary and cannot be voted on until the 2024 General Conference. A new version of 2553 is a possibility, but by no means definite; nor is it possible to know whether a new provision would have similar terms.

It is also possible, if Burnt Factory chooses to remain in the UMC, that new legislation could be introduced that would allow individual churches to choose whether they would conduct same-sex marriages or accept practicing, self-avowed homosexuals as pastors. There is no way to confidently predict what, if any, provision will be made for churches to choose their own paths regarding human sexuality. Finally, it must be noted that the UMC cannot directly force any pastor to conduct a same-sex marriage, or any marriage, whether the BoD language is changed or not.

5. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO PASTOR STEVE IF BFUMC DISAFFILIATES?

Pastor Steve has kept his position regarding his future to himself because he does not want it to affect Burnt Factory's vote on the issue. The vote of each professing member must be made from their conscience regarding how God is leading them. Pastor Steve was "re-appointed" on April 23, 2023 as BFUMC's pastor for the next year.

If BFUMC disaffiliates, Pastor Steve has choices that can be summarized as three basic options: 1) accept appointment to another church that remains in the UMC; 2) retire; or 3) pursue other pastoral opportunities outside of the United Methodist Church.

Pastor Steve must inform the UMC District Superintendent of his personal decision if and when BFUMC elects to continue with the disaffiliation process following the straw vote.

6. IF BURNT FACTORY DISAFFILIATES, WILL LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE BE BANNED FROM BURNT FACTORY?

Absolutely not! All people have been and will always be welcome at Burnt Factory and be able to hold full membership and any lay leadership position. This is an immutable element of Burnt Factory's mission. The BoD human sexuality language applies only to the covenant of marriage and the ordination of pastors.

7. WILL BURNT FACTORY NO LONGER BE METHODIST IF IT DISAFFILIATES FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

This would be a decision for the Church membership to make when the time is appropriate. The UMC is the largest of many Methodist expressions. Following disaffiliation, Burnt Factory could join another Methodist organization or become an independent Methodist church following Wesleyan ("Methodist") theology. Burnt Factory could also choose to join another denomination, but we think it extremely unlikely. As an independent Methodist church, the authority for all church decisions, including human sexuality issues, would reside within Burnt Factory.

If the straw vote results in Burnt Factory moving forward with the disaffiliation process, the Servants intend to recommend to the Church Council that, if and when Burnt Factory leaves the UMC, it should become an independent Methodist church.

PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. WHAT ARE THE BASIC STEPS IN THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?

- a. The BFUMC Church Council voted to initiate the disaffiliation process on February 8, 2023.
- b. BFUMC representatives met with the Shenandoah River District Superintendent on February 21, 2023 and notified the Virginia Annual Conference that BFUMC had voted to explore the prospect of disaffiliation.
- c. District Superintendent Dr. Victor Gomez met with BFUMC congregants on March 27, 2023 to share information and answer questions about disaffiliation.
- d. BFUMC began a thirty-day period of discernment and prayer on April 17, 2023.
- e. Prior to the 30-day prayer period, the Virginia Annual Conference offices provided BFUMC with a dollar figure that will have to be paid by Burnt Factory to the UMC before a disaffiliation is finalized. This figure is known as the "Taylor Number" based on a formula created by an Annual Conference employee named Taylor.
- f. We are currently evaluating the Taylor Number. We have several questions regarding the number (including correcting a clear mathematical error). The Servants are preparing a comprehensive financial analysis and projection for Burnt Factory; when the analysis is complete, we will provide the Taylor Number and analysis to the congregation. This analysis is of the highest priority in our efforts.

- g. Following the 30-day prayer period, professing members of BFUMC will participate in a straw vote to determine if there is sufficient support to proceed with the disaffiliation process.
- h. The straw vote will be held on the weekends of May 27 and June 3 at Burnt Factory. Additionally, volunteers will collect the votes of shut-ins. The vote will be by confidential paper ballot. Shut-in voting is the only voting permitted outside the church; it will not be available if there is a final vote at a Church Conference later in the summer.
- i. If the straw vote falls below two-thirds in favor of disaffiliation, the process will end and BFUMC will remain a part of the UMC.
- j. If the straw vote supports disaffiliation, Pastor Steve is required to notify the District Superintendent of his intentions.
- k. If the straw vote supports disaffiliation, an official vote on disaffiliation will be conducted at a called Church Conference, at which time BFUMC will decide whether to disaffiliate from or remain a part of the UMC. Per Paragraph 2553, the vote must be two-thirds in favor in order for a church to disaffiliate. As a practical matter, we would expect this Church Conference to take place approximately 60 days after the straw vote.
- l. The official vote shall be conducted by confidential paper ballot of *professing members in attendance at the Church Conference as required by Paragraph 2553*. To be clear, to vote, the professing member must be at the church; there are no exceptions to in-person voting at the Church Conference.
- m. If the Church Conference vote supports disaffiliation, the Annual Conference will provide a proposed disaffiliation agreement to Burnt Factory and, if necessary, proposed terms that are in addition to those set forth in the BoD will be negotiated.
- n. If Burnt Factory votes to disaffiliate, it will trigger another major step in the process: what happens to Burnt Factory following disaffiliation? This topic will be addressed in much greater detail prior to the final disaffiliation vote. The details of these options will be provided in an informational paper prior to the final vote.
- o. Following agreement on the terms of disaffiliation, a motion shall be made to the Annual Conference to approve the disaffiliation of Burnt Factory, which needs to be approved by a simple majority vote of the Annual Conference on October 7, 2023.
- p. Once approved by the Annual Conference, Burnt Factory will no longer be a part of the United Methodist Church, contingent upon one final step: payment of the finalized disaffiliation fee at a legal official closing date.

2. WHO CAN VOTE IN THE STRAW VOTE AND FINAL VOTE?

The answer is the same for both votes: only professing members of Burnt Factory UMC can cast votes. There are no age limits so long as you are a professing member. When you come to vote, there will be a

membership roll to verify eligible voters. The final vote can only be made in person at Burnt Factory at a called Church Conference chaired by the District Superintendent as required by Paragraph 2553.

3. WHO IS A PROFESSING MEMBER OF BURNT FACTORY UMC?

A professing member of Burnt Factory is a person whose membership is recorded with Burnt Factory and who is baptized and has taken vows declaring the Christian faith. Professing members include all people who have come into membership by profession of faith or by transfer from other churches.

4. CAN BURNT FACTORY CONDUCT MULTIPLE DISAFFILIATION VOTES?

Under Paragraph 2553 and the related processes, there will only be one straw vote and one final vote, the latter which will be held at a called Church Conference. There are no second votes in either case.

TIMELINE QUESTIONS

1. WHAT ARE THE MILESTONES IF BURNT FACTORY DISAFFILIATES?

Let's address how we arrive at the straw vote – followed by what happens from there.

- a. Burnt Factory's 30 days of prayerful discernment began on April 17th.
- b. After 30 days of prayer, Burnt Factory will conduct a straw poll to determine if the church should proceed with disaffiliation. The scheduled dates for the straw vote are the weekends of May 27 and June 3.
- c. If there is a two-thirds vote in favor of disaffiliation, the disaffiliation process will continue with the District Superintendent scheduling a called Charge Conference within 120 days for an official vote on disaffiliation. We expect the Church Conference to take place approximately 60 days after the straw vote.
- d. Following a Church Conference vote in favor of disaffiliation, a disaffiliation agreement would be finalized between an attorney for Burnt Factory and the Conference Trustees' attorney. This agreement would include the amount that Burnt Factory would have to pay in order to disaffiliate.
- e. Burnt Factory will have to make a motion to the Annual Conference to disaffiliate. The last called Annual Conference before Paragraph 2553 expires is October 7, 2023. All documentation and costs must be finalized 30 days prior to the conference.
- f. The target date to complete the documentation is mid-August, which provides a buffer for unknowns that may arise.
- g. Burnt Factory's financial responsibility is paid following approval of its disaffiliation motion by the Annual Conference; all property ownership is transferred to Burnt Factory and the disaffiliation is complete immediately after and not until this payment is made.

2. WHAT ARE THE UMC “CONFERENCES”?

In UMC jargon, a “conference” is more than just a large meeting, it refers to an organizational structure. *Charge or Church Conferences* are meetings of a church such as Burnt Factory, which is a “charge”. Charge Conferences are geared toward Church boards, councils, etc. Church Conferences are geared toward the entire membership of a church. *Annual Conferences* are meetings of a larger organization within the UMC, such as the Virginia Annual Conference. There are 54 Annual Conferences in the United States. Jurisdictional Conferences meet every four years and are primarily responsible for electing Bishops. Finally, the *General Conference* (which meets every four years) is a meeting of all the Annual Conferences throughout the UMC, world-wide.

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

1. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO BURNT FACTORY’S STAFF IF THE CHURCH DISAFFILIATES?

Burnt Factory staff — Rob Moss, Carrie Fair and Erin Hartman — are employees of Burnt Factory. It is our hope that all Burnt Factory employees will stay with Burnt Factory whether we disaffiliate, or not. They’re all awesome and a huge part of the Burnt Factory family.

POST-DISAFFILIATION QUESTIONS

1. WHAT HAPPENS TO MY MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IF BURNT FACTORY DISAFFILIATES?

The answer depends, in part, upon where a congregant’s professing membership is recorded. Professing members of Burnt Factory will lose their UMC membership following disaffiliation unless they move it to a church that is affiliated with the UMC. Burnt Factory leadership is willing to facilitate such membership movements. If a congregant attends Burnt Factory but is a professing member of a UMC-affiliated church, their membership in the UMC will be unaffected. According to our District Superintendent, after the ratification of a church’s motion for disaffiliation by the Annual Conference, all members of the church will receive a letter from the District office providing information for members that desire to transfer their membership to another UMC church.

FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

1. WHAT WILL IT COST BURNT FACTORY IF WE DISAFFILIATE?

There are costs associated with disaffiliation. This amount (called the Taylor Number) is determined by the Annual Conference. Under the terms of Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline, we are required to pay apportionments for this year and for 2024; note that the apportionments for this year will be paid in the ordinary course and do not represent an additional cost even though they are included in the Taylor Number. The disaffiliating church must pay a portion of the unfunded pension account of the Annual Conference and is obligated to pay all the legal fees associated with disaffiliation, including property transfer.

As mentioned above, a comprehensive financial analysis is being prepared that includes the Taylor Number and will be provided as soon as possible.

2. WHAT HAPPENS TO CHURCH PROPERTY IF BURNT FACTORY DISAFFILIATES?

The process of disaffiliation in Paragraph 2553 of the BoD is designed to enable disaffiliating churches to keep their personal and real property. The value of such property possessed by Burnt Factory will be a part of the financial analysis.

3. WHAT IS THE TRUST CLAUSE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The Trust Clause is set forth in Paragraph 2501 of the Book of Discipline and provides, in pertinent part:

2501. Requirement of the Trust Clause for All Property-

1. All properties of United Methodist local churches and other United Methodist agencies and institutions are held, *in trust*, for the benefit of the entire denomination, and ownership and usage of church property is subject to the *Discipline*.

In plain language, Paragraph 2501 means that the local churches, such as Burnt Factory, do not own their real property (e.g., land, buildings, etc.) and personal property (e.g., pianos, electronics, furniture, TVs). The UMC holds *all* church properties in a trust for the benefit of the entirety of the UMC, and not necessarily for the benefit of the local church. Thus, local churches that want to disaffiliate for any reason must either leave all their property behind or avail themselves of a process such as Paragraph 2553 in order to obtain ownership of their property. The Trust clause applies regardless of where the money to purchase the property originally came from, e.g., local church members.

[FAQ 1.0 as of May 2, 2023]

Please submit any questions you may have to Ang.Leigh.Hart@gmail.com