



## North Georgia Conference to Pause Disaffiliation Process

Dear North Georgia United Methodists,

As we approach the window set by the appointive cabinet to receive disaffiliation requests using Book of Discipline paragraph 2553, it has become clear that there is a need for a pause in this process for our conference.

It is the responsibility of conference leaders to ensure that the disaffiliation process, put into place by the conference board of trustees, is carried out with integrity and grace.

In its report to the North Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church in June 2021, and again in June 2022, the conference board of trustees affirmed its commitment to the concept of the gracious exit. In particular, the trustees affirmed a desire for disaffiliations to be handled in a fair, transparent, uniform, and good faith manner that affirms the one universal church in service to Christ and honors the mission and ministry of all Christians.

The board of trustees, in consultation with the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor, worked diligently to develop, update, and implement a disaffiliation process that would fulfill the requirements of the Book of Discipline and the stated aspirations of the conference board of trustees and the Annual Conference.

However, the cabinet has discovered and observed that many local churches

leadership, that is factually incorrect and defamatory. We have significant concerns about this misinformation and are well aware that it has the potential to do irreparable harm.

This information presented to members of local churches about disaffiliation has been outside the bounds of normal and acceptable civil discourse. It has not only been false and misleading but has been antithetical to the concept of a gracious exit or a commitment to honoring the mission and ministry of all Christians.

As a result of the misleading, defamatory, and false statements and materials shared with local church members by certain organizations as well as clergy and lay members of various churches and outside groups, we do not have confidence in the validity of upcoming church conference disaffiliation votes. After lengthy periods of discussion and consultation involving the cabinet, the board of trustees, and appropriate conference leadership, we have agreed that our Annual Conference cannot rely upon such votes for purposes of negotiating a gracious exit.

The ultimate step in the disaffiliation process is the ratification of disaffiliation agreements by the Annual Conference. However, because of the issues observed, the conference board of trustees is no longer confident it could recommend in good faith disaffiliation agreements to the Annual Conference at this time.

The appointive cabinet is therefore amending its previously presented policy and will not accept disaffiliation requests at this time nor will the conference board of trustees negotiate disaffiliation agreements.

The appointive cabinet, board of trustees, and bishop recognize the significance of this action.

We reaffirm our commitment to honor and uphold the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

We commit to walking alongside the clergy and laity of the North Georgia Conference as we together take this opportunity to re-set our focus on the mission of the church, to commit to deepening our focus on discipleship, and to

With just 15 months until the next session of the United Methodist General Conference, which will be held April 23 to May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, North Carolina, this pause will allow churches to gain more information about the real, rather than the false or hypothetical, future of our church.

We give thanks for all North Georgia United Methodists in all our varied contexts. We stand beside you knowing that pause and uncertainty are hard. We pray for you and your ministry daily as together we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Yours in Christ,  
Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson  
The Appointive Cabinet  
The Conference Board of Trustees

## Q&A

### **Why take this action now?**

In recent months, District Superintendents holding informational meetings have encountered an astounding proliferation of misinformation in local churches. This misinformation is being intentionally deployed, is present in every district, and has the potential to cause irreparable harm. As we approach the time to take the next step in the disaffiliation process, it is clear to the district superintendents, bishop, and the board of trustees that the process cannot go forward with integrity at this time. We are ethically obligated to pause the process.

### **What is the misinformation?**

The misinformation has come in the form of printed materials, PowerPoint presentations, websites, videos, emails, and social media posts. Some of the most pervasive misinformation and examples of a breach of integrity include:

- Clergy suggesting that members of one church would be willing to join another church to help push them over the threshold to disaffiliate.
- Clergy making presentations to congregations that are not their own, without the appointed pastor's permission, and in many cases without their knowledge, therefore, undermining their ministry.
- Church leaders communicating to members that "The UMC's theological impasse is rooted in our differing beliefs regarding the authority of the

widespread misinformation we've seen.

- Church leaders sharing that The United Methodist Church no longer believes in the resurrection of Christ. This is untrue.
- Churches holding secret meetings on this matter to which not all members are invited or equally informed.
- Presentations saying that in the future the UMC will force all churches to receive appointments of gay pastors, will force all clergy to officiate same-sex weddings, and that all churches must host same-sex weddings. This is untrue.
- Church leaders presenting disaffiliation as an opportunity to "own" church property. This is not the purpose of paragraph 2553 and it is an inappropriate use of this process.
- Church leaders communicating that North Georgia Conference leadership is not following the Book of Discipline. In fact, the North Georgia Annual Conference and its leaders have taken no actions in conflict with the Book of Discipline.
- Church leaders claiming that The Apostles Creed has been changed. This is untrue.
- Church leaders claiming that United Methodists no longer believe in the divinity of Christ. This is untrue.
- Church leaders claiming United Methodist seminaries are teaching a variety of unchristian material by non-Christian professors. This is untrue.
- ... *and so on*

### **How has the North Georgia Conference addressed the misinformation?**

The North Georgia Conference has offered steady online and in-person access to accurate information.

- District Superintendents have held more than 200 information sessions over the past year.
- The website [ngumc.org](http://ngumc.org) and, specifically [www.ngumc.org/BeUMC](http://www.ngumc.org/BeUMC), are updated regularly.
- The Conference has provided [printable, sharable Q&As](#).
- The Conference has empowered informed laity to speak on the topic to local churches.
- Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson has held six recent regional gatherings with opportunities for questions and answers. She met with pastors for conversation. She has met with lay members of Annual Conference in

- Clergy and laity of the North Georgia Conference shared their commitment to the church, directly countering the misinformation, through an Open Letter at [www.ngumc.org/OpenLetter](http://www.ngumc.org/OpenLetter).

### **Didn't the bishop say North Georgia wouldn't question a church's conscience?**

Since adopting the Disaffiliation Agreement in 2021, the bishop, cabinet, and board of trustees agreed that they assumed good faith and would not question the conscience of a church seeking disaffiliation. Their interest and commitment was to the integrity of the process. This path was affirmed by the United Methodist Judicial Council ([read that decision](#)).

This gracious approach was an invitation to proceed with integrity.

### **Misinformation is present everywhere in our country. If we couldn't move forward because of the presence of misinformation could we ever accomplish anything?**

Misinformation is not passively present in our churches, it is being intentionally deployed. There is no place for this behavior in United Methodist churches.

### **The bishop has said, "We are not trying to hold any church captive." Is this pause counter to her statement?**

Reaching the point of pausing this process was not the intention or the desire of the cabinet, the bishop, or the board of trustees. This pause is a direct response to deceptive behavior and manipulative misinformation deployed in local churches.

### **What does this pause offer?**

This pause offers churches an opportunity to re-set focus on the mission of the church, to commit to deepening our focus on discipleship, and to get to know our incoming episcopal leader, Bishop Robin Dease.

### **Is Bishop Dease aware of the pause?**

Yes. Bishop Robin Dease, who will begin her assignment as bishop of the North Georgia Annual Conference January 1, 2023, is aware of this pause and why it is necessary.

### **What is next?**

The next United Methodist General Conference has been announced for April

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Foremost, however, is the continued vital and missional work of the church. There are hungry and hurting neighbors who need us and there is a world that needs to know the love of Jesus Christ. That work must never pause.

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