

The Future of Lifehouse in The United Methodist Church

Please Note: Answers to the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are subject to change as new information becomes available.

As we go through this discernment process together, please pray consistently that we humbly surrender ourselves to God's Grace, His Mercy and His Will to determine the best path moving forward to expand and grow God's Kingdom so that He may be glorified. We also ask you to go to our website <https://lifehousefw.com/> and review Our Culture, Core Values and Beliefs. It is critically important that we evaluate our options within the context of God's Love and Mercy and how He would want us to live. Please pray that our collective decision would be a reflection of Him.

#1. What is on the horizon for Lifehouse?

*The **General Conference** is the global decision-making body of the United Methodist Church and is made up of approximately 800 delegates, equal in congregation members and pastors that make up the voting body. The General Conference is the only body that can change or add in terms of theological conviction within the United Methodist Church. There has been an on going debate for decades within the General Conference of the United Methodist Church concerning the ordination of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer/Questioning) clergy and same sex couple marriages in the church. Currently, neither of these are allowed within the rules of governing the United Methodist Church.*

*At the General Conference, scheduled to meet in the Fall of 2022, it is widely anticipated that there will be a provision for the ordination of LGBTQ clergy and marriage of same sex couples within the United Methodist Church. It is also anticipated for those who cannot accept this position, that there will be an approved equitable process for clergy and congregations to leave the United Methodist Church. That process is called the "Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation". Numerous United Methodist Churches are already leaving the denomination before the General Conference Vote. A signed copy of the protocol is available in the reference section for your review. **Since Lifehouse is a United Methodist Church, the question that we will need to answer at some point is what denominational direction does Lifehouse want to go.***

#2. When will the General Conference vote take place?

The General Conference vote was scheduled to have taken place in 2020 and again in 2021 (postponed due to the pandemic). The General Conference is now scheduled to meet August 29th to September 6th 2022 in Minneapolis.

#3. Why are we discussing this now?

This debate in the General Conference has been going on for decades. However, it is widely anticipated that approval of the "Separation Protocol" will take place at the next General Conference meeting. As we make decisions moving forward within Lifehouse, we want our decision making process to be made with clear direction and vision. The Lifeboard believes this is an appropriate time to discuss these options as we are currently in transition between lead pastors. The Lifeboard's goal is to make sure that the views of the members of the church and the views of our new lead pastor are in line. It would be unfair to all involved to receive a new pastor whose beliefs on these issues do not align with our church's overall beliefs.

#4. What is the role of the Lifeboard in this?

The Lifeboard's role has been to gather accurate information about the issues and present that information to the Lifehouse body of believers so that the members can make an informed decision. The Lifehouse board wants the congregation to ask questions and voice concerns. The Lifeboard also requests your prayers for discernment over the direction Lifehouse should choose. The board is committed to listening to your concerns carefully and doing our best to answer the questions you may have with honesty and integrity.

#5. If we determine to take a vote, who would be eligible to vote?

Since Lifehouse is a United Methodist Church, per the United Methodist Book of Discipline, only those who are official members in good standing with Lifehouse can vote. If you would like to become an official member of Lifehouse to be able to vote, email Cheryl Degler at cheryl@lifehousefw.com to complete the membership course.

#6. What would be our voting options?

There are currently only three approved options available to us. There may be others that may receive approval at the General Conference meeting, but we do not know how they will emerge or if they will emerge. The current choices are as follow:

#1. Vote to stay within the United Methodist Denomination and align with the Post-Separation United Methodist Church which will be more progressive in nature allowing for LGBTQ clergy to be ordained as well as approve the marriage of same sex couples in the church. Pastors will continue to be a direct appointment by the Bishop with input from the local church only as to the needs of the congregation and the characteristics of the new pastor the church is seeking. There would continue to be limited to no direct input on the Bishop's selection by the local church.

#2. Vote to leave the United Methodist Denomination and become a Global Methodist Church, (<https://globalmethodist.org/>) according to the "Reconciliation and Grace through Separation Protocol", the proposed legislation at the 2022 United Methodist General Conference,

scheduled August 29th through September 6th. The Global Methodist Church will retain the classic Christian position on marriage and ordination - LGBTQ+ individuals are not allowed to marry or be ordained within the Church. There will be some corporate structural changes in the denomination as well as growing pains as the Global Methodist Church develops and evolves over time. It has been communicated that pastors will continue to be appointed by the Bishop with more direct input from the local church in the selection process. What this looks like at this time, we do not know.

#3. Vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Denomination and become independent. This would allow us, as a congregation, to directly hire our next pastor to lead our congregation. It would also allow us flexibility to address the needs and concerns of our community in a way that we believe to be most appropriate for our local community. It would allow us as a local church to have more direct control and ownership. If Lifehouse would choose to create a position statement on LGBTQ clergy or same sex marriage, it would be developed & ratified based upon the Core Values, Beliefs and historical principles of Lifehouse. The Core Values, Beliefs and historical principles of Lifehouse would continue to be an integral part of every thing that we do in ministering to our community.

#7. How would a vote take place?

The voting process for disaffiliation has been specifically outlined by the General Conference as to how the vote is to be conducted. We would follow those rules. A vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Denomination and become independent would require 66.67% ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the registered voting members of Lifehouse present at the vote to vote in favor of disaffiliation. There is no proxy voting allowed. A vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Denomination and move to the Global Methodist Denomination would require a simple majority of the registered voting members of Lifehouse present at the vote to vote in favor to move to the Global Methodist Church. This vote, however, can not be taken until after the General Conference meets and approves the "Separation Protocol" as the Global Methodist Church will not be operational until after that point.

#8. Do we have to conduct a vote?

We do not have to conduct a vote on disaffiliation. If we do not conduct a vote, we will continue to remain a member of the United Methodist Denomination just as we are now until we decide a vote on disaffiliation is appropriate. Lifehouse may never determine that it is appropriate. However, it would be irresponsible for the Lifeboard not to keep the congregation informed of issues that may have a direct impact upon us, our Core Values and Beliefs and the options that are available to us. This is what the Lifeboard is working hard to do.

If we do nothing and the "Separation Protocol" is passed at the next General Conference meeting, which is widely anticipated, and we determine to stay within the Methodist Denomination, we will automatically become the Post-Separation United Methodist Church by default. There may be a need to conduct a Lifehouse vote as to what direction we would want to

go within the Methodist Denomination once we see if there are any changes in the options available. As we understand at this moment, the option to disaffiliate from the Methodist Denomination and become independent under the stated conditions is only available to us until December 31, 2023. If the disaffiliation contract to become independent is not acted upon by that time, per the agreement, the contract becomes null and void. Could there be changes at the General Conference concerning this? We have no way of knowing at this time.

Regardless of what happens at the General Conference Meeting, it is critically important to keep our eyes focused on what God has planned for growing His Kingdom through Lifehouse in reaching the hearts and souls of people in our community in a way that is reflective of God's love, grace and mercy. Our goal concerning this open discussion is to discern God's guidance as to the most effective and efficient way of growing His Kingdom for the future. Please pray for His guidance!

#9. If I am part of the LGBTQ community, am I welcome at Lifehouse?

Yes, we follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, for all who seek his love, mercy, and grace will be accepted by Jesus and Lifehouse Church. *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins."* Romans 3:23-24

#10. Will we be changing our Belief Statements/Core Values?

There are no plans to change our Belief Statements or Core Values.

#11. How would a vote impact Connor and Seth?

A vote would not have a direct impact upon Seth as he is considered a direct hire of Lifehouse. Pastor Connor's decision would be made by him and his family and be independent of the member vote. If the member vote is to stay with the Post-Separation United Methodist Church, there would be no impact upon Pastor Connor if he would choose to stay with the Post-Separation United Methodist Church. He could individually choose not to be part of the Post-Separation United Methodist Church regardless of the member vote. If the member vote is to move to the Global Methodist Church and Pastor Connor would want to move as well to the Global Methodist Church, he would maintain his credentials. If the member vote is to disaffiliate and become independent and Pastor Connor would choose to do the same, he would surrender all of his credentials. Pastor Connor's decision to be with the Post-Separation United Methodist Church, Global Methodist Church or to disaffiliate and become independent would be his own decision and is not dependent upon the member vote.

#12. How would a vote impact the ownership of our facilities?

All of our facilities are currently owned in "Trust" by the United Methodist Church. We do not own our facilities, but yet have all the responsibility for taking care of the facilities, paying the

insurance etc. If we choose to move to the Global Methodist Church, they are communicating that the local church will own their facilities, how this will play out, we do not know for sure as the Global Methodist Church is not operational yet. If we disaffiliate and become independent, we will own the facilities per the "Disaffiliation Agreement". Upon our 1 time payment in full, to the United Methodist Church, the deeds to all of the facilities will be transferred to Lifehouse's new 501-C3 entity via a quit claim deed.

#13. What would be the cost involved if we disaffiliate?

Lifehouse currently pays \$61,000.00 per year as a tithe to the United Methodist Conference which goes to pay for Indiana children's homes, homes for those in addiction recovery, nursing homes, hospitals, colleges, universities, seminaries, youth camps, the administration costs in the Indiana United Methodist Conference plus a wide variety of missions throughout the United States and the rest of the world. As we understand, this will continue to be expected, but there would be no one time cost to remain within the Post-Separation "United Methodist Church". In our communication with leaders of the Global Methodist Church, there would be no cost to move to the Global Methodist Church, however they will continue to expect a tithe. They are saying it will be less (saying around ½ of what we are paying now), but no definitive answer at this time.

We have reviewed the "Disaffiliation Agreement" to become independent from the Indiana Annual Conference office as to the cost if we choose to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Denomination. The cost to disaffiliate is a one time cost estimated to be \$395,000.00. This amount will fluctuate a little based upon the timing of our disaffiliation. As of July 29th, 2021, the breakout of costs would be as follows: #1. \$28,356.00 for any unpaid tithe for the twelve (12) months immediately prior to the Disaffiliation Date, as calculated by the Annual Conference (we are current on our tithe); #2. An additional twelve (12) months of tithe totaling \$61,563.00; #3. An amount equal to Local Church's pro rata share, as determined by Annual Conference, of Annual Conference's unfunded pension obligations, based on the Annual Conference's aggregate funding obligations as determined by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider totaling \$248,527.30; #4. An amount equal to Local Church's pro rata share, as determined by Annual Conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, of Annual Conference's Retiree Health Insurance Subsidy obligations, totaling \$56,163.00.

#14. Where would the money come from if we disaffiliate?

The fee to disaffiliate and become independent must be paid all at once. Disaffiliation will not take place until the fee is paid in full. The disaffiliation fee must be paid before the next Indiana Annual Conference meeting of the year the vote is taken. The Annual meeting is typically held in June of each year. There are ways that we can absorb the fee. We would not necessarily have to absorb the entire fee all at once. Due to your generosity, the Lifeboard feels comfortable that we can set aside \$200,000.00 - \$250,000.00 today to put towards disaffiliation with no impact on daily operations and still have adequate reserves for emergencies. We would be saving

immediately \$61K per year upon disaffiliation due to no longer having to pay district and conference tithes. This means that we would either need to borrow the balance from a bank, borrow from an affiliate independent church or raise the funds internally ourselves with a capital raise over and above our normal giving. Obviously, the less that we would need to take out of reserves the better. The Lifeboard, however, feels confident that this obligation could be accomplished with appropriate lead time.

#15. How would a vote impact the pre-school, our church programs, our outreach programs, our lead team?

All of our programs are based upon the Core Values, Beliefs and historical principles that are outlined on the Lifehouse website at <https://lifehousefw.com/>. These Core Values, Beliefs and historical principles will continue to guide and shape all that we do through Lifehouse.

#16. How would a vote impact our worship services?

The Lifeboard does not anticipate any changes in our worship services. There are no plans to change the daily operation of the church.

#17. Will there be open discussions available to ask further questions to the Lifeboard?

The Lifeboard has scheduled multiple discussion opportunities for you to ask questions in the Month of October and to go over the information we have learned. We invite you to attend as many of these meetings as you would like. We want you to be as fully informed as possible. Also feel free to email your questions to the Lifeboard at the following email address: Lifeboard@LifehouseFW.com

REFERENCES

United Methodist Church

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016. Nashville, Tennessee: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016.

Global Methodist Church

Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline, Global Methodist Church, <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/> 2020.

General Conference Proposed Legislation | 2022

Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation, <https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation>, Proposed General Conference Legislation for the 2022 gathering.

Articles and News Websites

United Methodist General Conference News - <https://www.umnews.org/en/landing-pages/general-conference-news-and-commentary>

Christianity Today - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/umc-leave-church-methodist-split-lgbt-conference-protocol.html>

<https://um-insight.net/>

Time to Go: Why we must pass the protocol: <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/time-to-go-why-we-must-pass-the-protocol>

Reformation Not Separation: An Argument for Keeping the UMC Together: <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/reformation-not-separation-an-argument-for-keeping-the-umc-together>

Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation https://docs.google.com/document/d/19o5578ocj5JVEa4jWsvqz_oHQoNzIAX-/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=100324691135952252137&rtpof=true&sd=true

Church Options Comparison Chart https://docs.google.com/document/d/18SdzIMwff2FR9lomopc_DUGyHU3v9hQB/preview