



Town Hall Questions & Answers

Below you will find a complete list of questions received from our congregations at the Town Hall on August 28 and prior. While identifying information has been removed, the questions appear in their original uncut format along with the response from the Discernment Team. Questions can still be submitted throughout this process. In addition, much deeper conversation can be had at the Foundations Study, Living Room Gatherings, and Pastor One-on-One Conversations. Sign up for any of these opportunities for engagement at our web page covenantconnects.org/future-affiliation

Is there any end in sight to this town hall?

We guess so.

Would there be any impact to the current mortgage through the UMC entity?

No. The Texas Methodist Foundation lends to any Wesleyan church in Texas. Our loan would continue to be serviced through TMF.

What is the return on investment for the payment into a conference - specifically, what is the value of the benefits that Covenant derives relative to the "franchise fee"? What would be the cost of going independent and how much would the administrative burden increase relative to cost savings?

Below you will find the breakdown of our Annual Conference Apportionments in the UMC. It is easier to identify ROI through some more than others.

- World Service - \$7,426
- Ministerial Education Fund - \$2,508
- Black College Fund - \$1,000
- Africa UM University - \$224
- Interdenominational Cooperative - \$196
- General ADM Fund - \$882
- Jurisdictional Apportionment - \$455
- Episcopal Fund - \$2,199
- Center for Church Leadership - \$3,890
- Mission & Communications - \$3,319
- Center for Connectional Resources - \$2,866
- Campus Ministries - \$2,059
- District Superintendents' Fund - \$4,685
- Equitable Compensation Fund - \$245
- Medical Benefits Program Hospitals - \$2,091
- Central North District Apportionment - \$1,583
- TOTAL - \$37,020

Covenant seeks to advance its connectional Wesleyan heritage rather than seeking the narrowness of localized accountability through independence. If Covenant chooses to disaffiliate, our Church

Council believes we should remain connectional through a new denominational affiliation. We have not calculated the administrative burden of taking on self-governing doctrine, regional evangelistic initiatives, global impact, clergy assessment, clergy deployment, and pension and benefits.

What is the accountability structure in the GMC for pastors and leadership? And what is global breakdown structure of the Global Methodist denomination?

In the Global Methodist Church bishops are accountable to the General Conference, their leadership is term-limited and requires re-election for additional terms. Presiding elders provide a source of accountability in clusters of 8-15 churches where the relationships can be maintained. Pastors serve without the guarantee of appointment in the GMC which holds them accountable to faithfulness and fruitfulness in fresh ways. The structure of the GMC no longer includes jurisdictions or districts (at least as we've known them). Churches relate to Annual Conferences and Annual Conferences relate to the General Conference.

The specific issue on the different views of homosexuality seems to always be danced around. Why can't we directly address it? People may not understand the basis of the issue in the split of the church.

While it is commonly agreed that our theology of human sexuality is the presenting issue that is dividing the church, the root cause of this divide is much more broadly debated. Is the primary issue doctrinal authority, the placement of scripture amongst God's revelation to humankind, or sexual holiness? We will engage in conversation around human sexuality in our Pastor One-on-One conversations, Living Room Gatherings, and Foundations Bible study.

If we disaffiliate, how will gay youth be treated?

If a student shared with us that they were LGBTQ+ we would, first and foremost assure them that we love them and they are a beloved child of God. We would continue to maintain the expectation of love in the body, which, at Covenant, is, and has always been, a universal welcome in hospitality, fellowship, worship, discipleship, sacrament, and membership.

What will happen if a gay youth feels called to the ministry?

We are called to love all and accept all into the discipling fellowship of the church. While we were yet sinners (unworthy) Christ came and died for us as an offering of redemption. In so doing, he did not turn away from anyone, but rather called everyone to turn from their sin and follow him in humble submission.

If a LGBTQ+ student from our Covenant family articulated to us a call to ministry we would, first and foremost, reiterate our love, and most importantly God's love for them. Then we would enter into a time of listening to their story, drawing into a deeper relationship with them. As with any minor discerning a calling, there would be a conversation with the parents about honoring the discipleship of their child. It is our hope and expectation that this process is intentionally relational, multi-faceted, and seeks to be radically loving. We would defer to the Holy Spirit's leading on when to engage in conversations concerning God's invitation to sexual holiness as a faithful practice for those striving to follow Jesus.

As has been the practice in the UMC, in the GMC if a person articulates a call to ministry they enter into a significant process through which the church examines their call and discerns evidence of their readiness for ministry. This process includes a series of interviews, psychological examinations, credit checks, background checks and theological examinations. This process calls each pastor to holiness of heart and life held in accountable relationships with other pastors and the Bishop they serve under. As a part of the process pastors make a vow to maintain faithfulness in Christian marriage (defined as

between one man and one woman) or celibacy in singleness.

Historically, in the UMC, if a person articulates a calling to be in a same gender relationship, we would bless them as they pursue that calling in another denomination. In the GMC, we would do the same; that other denomination would likely be the future UMC.

If a child of a same sex couple comes forward for baptism or confirmation, will they be able to be baptized or confirmed if we disaffiliate?

Absolutely. All are welcome to receive the chief means of grace through baptism and communion. All who profess their faith, are baptized, and commit to the membership vows of the church are welcome as members.

Do we believe we are going to reach more people for Christ if we disaffiliate?

Our individual capacity as believers to reach more people for Jesus is not related to our affiliation with any denomination. Each of us is called to make disciples of Jesus Christ as is our Great Commission. That said, Covenant's capacity to reach people for Jesus can be enhanced or constrained by our denominational affiliation. Part of our discernment as a body is to determine which affiliation best enhances our congregational mission.

Do you believe this is an issue worth dividing the church over?

The United Methodist Church through the 2019 General Conference acknowledged the division in the church by adopting paragraph 2553. In it, a pathway for faithful discernment was created through which congregations could choose their affiliation in a spirit of blessing.

At Covenant, it is our hope that through a process of faithful discernment we will choose an affiliation and move forward in unity continuing to build a *Community Connecting in Christ*.

If we go UMC and our pastors leave, won't UMC help us find pastors?

Yes. The district superintendent would work with the Staff Development Team and the new Resident Bishop to appoint a new team of pastors to Covenant.

Who did Jesus turn away or say you are unworthy?

Jesus says "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." (John 3:3) None of us are worthy on our own accord. Rather, God made each of us worthy to approach His throne of righteousness by making "him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5: 21) Jesus consistently met with the least, the last, and the lost offering grace and transformation. (John 7:53-8:11, Mark 10:17-27, John 5: 1-15) While we were yet sinners (unworthy) Christ came and died for us as an offering of redemption. In so doing, he did not turn away from anyone, but rather called everyone to turn from their sin and follow him in humble submission.

Do you think we'll be more faithful Christians as members of GMC?

An individual's faithfulness to Christ is not related to the denominational affiliation of their local church. Each of us is called into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. Each person's faithfulness is a journey of sanctification through which we pursue holiness of heart and life through surrender to the Lord. That said, Covenant's capacity to disciple more faithful Christians can be enhanced or constrained by our denominational affiliation. Part of our discernment as a body is to determine which affiliation best enhances our congregational mission.

Aren't we breaking our covenant with the Methodist Church if we vote to leave?

The United Methodist Church through the 2019 General Conference acknowledged the division in the denomination by adopting paragraph 2553. Through this act the UMC established faithfully discerned disaffiliation as living in accordance with the discipline of our covenant.

Why would we go into the GMC before we know its doctrine, structure, finances, congregational support?

The Global Methodist Church is governed by *The Transitional Book of Doctrines and Disciplines* which you can read here. <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/> In the BoDD you will find its doctrines, structure, and organization for supporting local congregations as they make disciples. The GMC has been supported by invested donors as it launches, but does not have the expansive reserves of the UMC institution.

What is the difference between the GMC and UMC position on abortion?

The UMC position on abortion can be found here: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>

The UMC bishops also released a statement earlier this summer that you can find here. <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/roe+v.+wade+cob+response+062422.pdf>

The GMC position on abortion can be found here in paragraph 202.3:
<https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/>

Can you give everyone a breakdown of how the non-United States UMC member churches impact the vote on matters at conference?

As the Methodist movement has flourished across Africa, Eastern Europe, and in the Philippines, the USA UMC has declined precipitously. That membership shift has moved an ever-increasing proportion of the General Conference delegation to the largely traditional-leaning global delegates.

How much money did UMC give to Covenant this last year? It is my understanding Hispanic ministry has been supported by UMC in part.

The 2022 support from the Texas Annual Conference Hispanic ministry initiative for Covenant's Spanish worship community is \$73,381. This is the final year of the grant from the TAC. We have communicated clearly with the Spanish worship community from the beginning that the Texas Annual Conference has supported the ministry through Pastor Dario's compensation as the foundation was laid in the first 3 years

How much money has the UMC given to Covenant over its lifetime?

\$375,842	Planting Pastor Salary and Benefits for First 3 Years
\$250,000	Planting Ministry Grant
\$400,000	Land Purchase Grant
\$201,798	Planting Spanish Pastor Salary and Benefits in Launch Phase
\$1,227,640	TOTAL

Covenant received grants from The Texas Annual Conference in our first 3 years of ministry and in the launch season of the Spanish worship community. The TAC has graciously elected not to claim any liabilities for those grants in the cost structure for local church disaffiliation discernment (which they had the authority to do under paragraph 2553). Instead they view those grants as disciple-making gifts.

Why are we only submitting questions digitally?

The town hall process developed by the Discernment Team and approved by the Church Council allowed for digital-only questions to steward our time together and focus on providing information. We also sought to limit the potentially harmful debate-style forum commonly experienced in General Conference and Annual Conference. Living Room Gatherings, pastor one-on-ones, and the Foundations Bible Study will allow for future engagement through deeper conversation.

Would the money owed on buildings and facilities become due upon moving to the GMC? Is it fair that we would have to seek new pastors under UMC?

No. If Covenant chose to affiliate with the GMC our loan would continue to be serviced through Texas Methodist Foundation. TMF lends to any Wesleyan church in Texas.

Clergy and churches have different timelines for discernment. Our pastors have all concluded their discernment process and feel called to future service in the Global Methodist Church. If Covenant chose to remain affiliated with the United Methodist Church the district superintendent would work with the Staff Development Team and the new Resident Bishop to appoint a new team of UMC pastors to Covenant.

What is the total cost to separate from UMC?

Covenant paid last year's apportionments in full and has budgeted to pay this year's apportionments in full. There is currently no unfunded pension liability in The Texas Annual Conference. This means the only cost Covenant would pay to disaffiliate from the UMC would be the legal costs associated with revising our legal documents (Articles of Incorporation, Deeds, etc.). The Finance Team estimates this cost would be \$2,000-\$3,000.

What does releasing the trust clause mean in GMC? Would it mean the Covenant would then own the land and facilities outright or something else?

Yes. There is no trust clause in the GMC. If Covenant chose to affiliate with the GMC this would mean that Covenant would own all property and assets outright.

[In the GMC] how does the change in the appointment process still ensure that there is diversity in clergy and leadership? While I want the best person for the job, I am still nervous about there being a bottleneck of women and people of color not getting the position due to bias.

This is a concern for the forming GMC. While discussions have taken place around the institution of a 'Rooney Rule' in the consultative appointive process, some wonder if that is enough. In the midst of the concern, it is encouraging to see women leading the way in the formation of the denomination. The first President Pro Tem (interim bishop) and the chair of the Wesleyan Covenant Association (the group that incubated the launch of the GMC are both women. This is also a continuing concern for the UMC. While the UMC embraces an appointive itineracy, the denomination has rarely elevated women to leadership in large congregations.

What does accountability look like in the UMC if others are not following the Book of Discipline? If we aren't concerned with everyone following the Book of Discipline, does it not set a precedent for anyone to do as they wish rather than follow the set governing rules and the Book of Discipline?

This is a concern for the UMC. Now that the formula for disobedience has been written it will take substantive will to restore the covenant accountability. This challenge will be exacerbated by the constitutional requirements that the Judicial Council will require to be overcome. There are processes for complaints, charges, and trials that can result in accountability in the current discipline. How this will be enforced is yet to be seen.

With the role of gay/lesbian inclusion being the flashpoint of this conversation in the church; will either GMC or UMC have stated doctrine that allows for gay/lesbian clergy/bishops and/or marriage? If not, what, if any are the major doctrine differences that will affect Covenant moving forward? Or is it mostly procedural differences?

The UMC has considered legislation in the One Church Plan and the Christmas Covenant (formally referred to as the Connectional Conference Plan) at the last two General Conference meetings. Both plans create pathways for localized definitions of marriage and standards for ordination. While it is speculative, it is widely expected that one of the two plans will be lifted up for support in 2024. With the large wave of traditionalist disaffiliation, it seems highly likely that the UMC will adopt one of these plans. The GMC definition of marriage and standards of ordination with regard to sexual holiness reflect the current UMC Book of Discipline.

There are many differences in the two denominations with regard to structure and organization. Some examples include: expanded consultation requirements for pastoral appointments, no guaranteed appointments, significantly reduced connectional funding, term limited bishops who must be re-elected to additional terms, and no trust clause.

There are a few doctrinal differences including: the addition of the Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, and Chalcedonian Definition as doctrinal and the Restrictive Rules being solely focused on the doctrine.

Other UMC churches in nearby parishes have disaffiliated from the UMC without joining a new denomination. Apparently Church Council has ruled out disaffiliating from a denomination. I think we members should be included in that discernment. I do not understand the value of denominational affiliation. In fact, I think it is a potentially harmful distraction from our vision of "building a community connected in Christ." What is the reason why only GMC and UMC options are to be discerned? Is there an option for Covenant to go independent of either denomination? What value does being in a denomination bring in building a community connected in Christ in Creekside? It seems denominational issues divert attention from being the Church in our community.

The Church Council believes that Covenant should seek to advance its connectional Wesleyan heritage rather than seeking the narrowness of localized accountability through independence. If Covenant chooses to disaffiliate, our Church Council believes we should remain connectional through a new denominational affiliation where we are bound in connection through doctrine, regional evangelistic initiatives, global impact, clergy assessment, clergy deployment, and pension and benefits.

The Church Council will consider the format of the resolution in October. It is possible that the decision will be divided into two resolutions; one to disaffiliate and one to affiliate. In this scenario, if the members' discernment led to a different conclusion than the current view of the Church Council, independence would be possible. Covenant's capacity to reach people for Jesus can be enhanced or constrained by our denominational affiliation. Part of our discernment as a body is to determine which affiliation best enhances our congregational mission.

If we vote to disaffiliate will it be a simple yes or no? If that vote says yes will this mean we are voting to affiliate with the Global Methodist Church or will another vote on the new affiliation come later?

The resolution has not been crafted yet. The Discernment Team is meeting in early October to reflect on our "40 Days of Prayer" and develop a proposed resolution. The Church Council will consider the recommendation of a resolution on October 9. It is possible that the Church Council would choose to consider these two matters in two separate votes; disaffiliate from the UMC (yes or no), affiliate with

the GMC (yes or no). Or, it could be presented as one resolution; disaffiliate from the UMC and affiliate with the GMC (yes or no). Since our Church Conference date is so late in the calendar year, we do not anticipate calling two separate Church Conferences for two separate votes. The paperwork necessary in order to prepare for a January 1 effective date does not afford us that additional time.

Is Book of Discipline seen as inspired writing like scripture, or is The Book of Discipline the work of humans and therefore subject to human errors, flaws, biases?

These statements from the Confession of Faith and Articles of Religion articulate our view of scripture.

Article IV — The Holy Bible

We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation."

Article V — Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.

The Book of Discipline is subordinate to scripture. We do, however, believe the doctrines of the church have been instructed by scripture and the Holy Spirit. That is why the Doctrine section of *The Book of Discipline* is designed to be extraordinarily challenging to amend. But, it could be done. We believe the structure and the practice of the church that is contained in the remainder of *The Book of Discipline* is arrived at through holy conferencing where the Holy Spirit is present leading the church. These portions of *The Book of Discipline* are more simply amended signifying an even greater distance from the understood inspiration of scripture.

How will GMC pastors be educated and developed moving forward?

Global Methodist Church pastors will be educated through the equivalent of UMC Course of Study or University degree plans (MDiv, MTh, etc.) offered by seminaries across the country. Course of Study can be utilized as the pathway for ordination as deacons and elders in the GMC in order to streamline the on-boarding of called clergy without the secondary credentialing of Licensed Local Pastors.

What if there aren't enough pastors for congregations in either the UMC or the GMC?

The UMC has long held concern for pastor/congregation imbalance because of the guaranteed appointment system. At different points in our history the imbalance has been felt on both sides of the ledger. When we needed to deploy more Elders as Lead Pastors congregations have been able to utilize less Elders for their program ministry leaders in associate pastoral positions. When we have had more Elders than churches we have deployed them into multiple church charges. In this way balance has been maintained and the Lord has been faithful to raise up leaders for His church.

In the GMC, these tools of associate pastor positions and multiple church charges will be utilized to meet the imbalance. One distinct difference is that the GMC will not have guaranteed appointment or mandatory retirement (in the UMC it is 72 years old).

What would we be able to do differently as a church body if we were GMC? How would it change our worship or day to day lives?

When considering what might look different; we would be able to reallocate the reduced apportionment dollars (our support for the denomination) into Covenant's mission and ministries and also embrace the discipleship models of Wesley's Methodist movement including an introduction to the Christian faith course (catechism) and an emphasis on small group ministries (class meetings).

If Covenant chose to affiliate with the GMC our worship would not change.

No denominational affiliation will change our day to day lives. That can only be accomplished through faith in Jesus with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Are the beliefs in the trinity different under UMC and GMC?

The articulated doctrines of the trinity in the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith are identical in the UMC and the GMC. However, systems of accountability to doctrine have been strained and in some cases broken within the UMC. The GMC created models of accountability through which pastors and bishops are responsible for maintaining the sound doctrinal teaching, including that of the trinity.

[The GMC speaker] referred to decisions that were made in Wesley's time. In that time, the cultural norm did not allow women in vocational ministry. At one time, divorced persons could not serve in vocational ministry. If church choices have changed due to cultural norms, how is the issue of queer marriage different? AND how will the GMC determine who is called and who is not?

Lasting reforms in the church have taken place over the course of history through a faithful foundation in scripture. Christians derive our worldview not from the culture around us but from the revelation of God through the scriptures and the Holy Spirit. The entire witness of scripture is taken into consideration to determine if a Biblical idea is either culturally specific or culturally transcendent. We will specifically address the positive Biblical witness that has led the church to affirm women in ministry and many divorced persons' call to ministry in our Foundations Bible Study. We hope that you will attend. The practice of homosexuality has been maintained as "incompatible with Christian teaching" in the UMC because, when taking the entire witness of Scripture on the issue, there are no affirmative statements on same gender sexual relations.

As has been the practice in the UMC, in the GMC if a person articulates a call to ministry they enter into a significant process through which the church examines their call and discerns evidence of their readiness for ministry. This process includes a series of interviews, psychological examinations, credit checks, background checks and theological examinations. This process calls each pastor to holiness of heart and life held in accountable relationships with other pastors and the Bishop they serve under.

Are there financial risks associated with departing from the UMC?

The financial risks of our affiliation choice is most directly related to the unity we maintain in the body as we move forward in mission together. Additionally, there are some financial risks on both sides of the decision; the GMC is a young denomination with start-up concerns and the UMC is a denomination that is financially structured for a much larger base of support than it currently has and will have.

The UMC speaker said, "Sin need not be a requirement in our lives." But humanity. Do we not believe that in this world, there will be sin? We are in the world. We sin & this is why we need Christ. We seek to be more like Christ, but we cannot BE Christ. Is he not suggesting there is a hierarchy of sin?

I do not believe that the speaker was suggesting a hierarchy of sin. Instead I believe they were referencing the Christian doctrine of entire sanctification that Methodist founder John Wesley championed. In the UMC and GMC Confession of Faith it is articulated in this way.

Article XI — Sanctification and Christian Perfection

We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace through the Word and the Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this life both gradually and instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and the devil are put under his feet. Thus he rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is the likelihood that The Book of Discipline will finally be amended at General Conference in 2024?

The Book of Discipline in the UMC will certainly be amended at the 2024 General Conference as it is at every General Conference. It is also very likely that the next General Conference will amend *The Book of Discipline* to alter the church's teaching and practice in marriage and human sexuality. This change is most likely to occur through the adoption of one of two models that have previously been presented on multiple occasions and failed; The One Church Plan and the Christmas Covenant (formerly the Connectional Conference Plan). Both plans create a localized sexual ethic giving space for conferences, churches, and pastors to act in accordance with their convictions. This further emphasizes that the UMC is continuing to shift from a doctrinal foundation to one of pluralism. Finally, either of these models adds additional strain to local churches with regards to marriage and human sexuality as multiple church committees would now have authority to alter a local church's position annually.

How do we as Christians justify the exclusion of LGBTQ from being pastors if we are to love and accept all?

We are called to love all and accept all into the discipling fellowship of the church. While we were yet sinners (unworthy) Christ came and died for us as an offering of redemption. In so doing, he did not turn away from anyone, but rather called everyone to turn from their sin and follow him in humble submission.

If a LGBTQ+ person from our Covenant family articulated to us a call to ministry we would, first and foremost, we would reiterate our love, and most importantly God's love for them. Then we would enter into a time of listening to their story, drawing into a deeper relationship with them. We would defer to the Holy Spirit's leading on when to engage in conversations concerning God's invitation to sexual holiness as a faithful practice for those striving to follow Jesus. As can be seen, this is a process that is intentionally relational, multi-faceted, and seeks to be radically loving.

As has been the practice in the UMC, in the GMC if a person articulates a call to ministry they enter

into a significant process through which the church examines their call and discerns evidence of their readiness for ministry. This process includes a series of interviews, psychological examinations, credit checks, background checks and theological examinations. This process calls each pastor to holiness of heart and life held in accountable relationships with other pastors and the Bishop they serve under. As a part of the process pastors make a vow to maintain faithfulness in Christian marriage (defined as between one man and one woman) or celibacy in singleness.

Historically, in the UMC, if a person articulates a calling to be in a same gender relationship, we would bless them as they pursue that calling in another denomination. In the GMC, we would do the same; that other denomination would likely be the future UMC.

What do you see as the main benefits of GMC vs UMC?

1. Structuring the denomination as doctrinal
2. No Guaranteed Appointments
3. No Trust Clause
4. Reduced Connection Funding (apportionments)
5. Term Limited Bishops
6. Systems of Accountability
7. Streamlined pathways to ordination
8. Lean Global Institution
9. Emphasis on Church Planting
10. Embrace of our Wesleyan heritage in catechism and class meeting (small groups)

Regarding UMC apportionments: Ministries, Missions, Outreach, retirement plans, insurance, educational scholarships. What provisions for pastors, staff, students, and congregations will be available in the GMC?

The GMC does not intend to develop its own Board of Global Ministries as is the case in the UMC. Instead, the GMC is partnering with existing ministries that have proven track records. The GMC is committed to planting churches: the articulated goal is to plant 3500 new churches around the world in the next 7 years. They have partnered with The River Network to train planters and already have over 100 pastors ready to plant in the USA. The emphasis in the GMC returns the work of church planting to laity and local churches instead of the institution. The GMC has retirement plans and health benefits through Wespath (the current provider of the UMC). The GMC does not yet have the scholarship fund functional, but has announced that they will not be funding seminaries as the UMC does; instead they will be investing in scholarships for pastors so that the connectional support will follow the students.

Can you provide the pro life vs pro choice differences between UMC and GMC?

The UMC position on abortion can be found here: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>

The UMC bishops also released a statement earlier this summer that you can find here: <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/roe+v.+wade+cob+response+062422.pdf>

The GMC position on abortion can be found here in paragraph 202.3: <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/>

Is every UMC affiliated church in the U.S. going through a discernment process?

No. Each United Methodist Church's leadership board has the decision in this season to go through discernment for future affiliation or not. But, if a church board decides to avoid discernment in this season, that is a decision to belong to the increasingly progressive UMC. In our conference over 290

churches are in a season of discernment or have already voted to disaffiliate. That represents nearly 50% of our conference.

Should the issue of Christian marriage be considered secondary doctrine?

We do not consider the issue of Christian marriage as primary doctrine as we would; the trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection, sin, atonement, and the authority of scripture amongst others. That does not mean, however, that we view the doctrine of Christian marriage as non-essential. After all, marriage is the means through which God fulfills His covenant to Abraham to multiply his descendants through which He will bless the world, Jesus utilizes the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom to articulate the relationship between the church and Jesus, and the teaching on Christian marriage is rooted in the authority of scripture which is a primary doctrine.

How would we engage with youth who identify at LGBTQ?

If a student shared with us that they were LGBTQ+ we would, first and foremost assure them that we love them and they are a beloved child of God. We would continue to maintain the expectation of love in the body, which, at Covenant, is and has always been a universal welcome in hospitality, fellowship, worship, discipleship, sacrament, and membership.

Would you address specific theological differences between the UMC & GMC?

What is the UMC denouncing? Please provide scriptural support for each tenet.

The Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, Wesley's sermons and Wesley's Notes on the New Testament are all held in common in the doctrine of the UMC and the GMC. The GMC has added the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition as doctrine. The greater difference is not between the two denominations articulated theology; it is in the practice of, and accountability to, the doctrine. In the UMC there are many examples of bishops, seminary professors, and pastors professing a theology far outside of the bounds of our shared doctrine with no call to accountability. For this reason it seems the UMC is only denouncing the limits to the size of the 'Big Tent' that can contain her doctrines.

Will the entire membership vote to determine the future of the church or will it be decided by our church council?

Each professing member of Covenant attending the in-person vote at the Called Church Conference on October 23 at 2pm will vote on Covenant's future affiliation. It requires a 2/3 margin to disaffiliate.

What will be the financial cost of leaving the United Methodist denomination? Will we be able to afford it?

Covenant paid last year's apportionments in full and has budgeted to pay this year's apportionments in full. There is currently no unfunded pension liability in The Texas Annual Conference. This means the only cost Covenant would pay to disaffiliate from the UMC would be the legal costs associated with revising our legal documents (Articles of Incorporation, Deeds, etc.). The Finance Team estimates this cost would be \$2,000-\$3,000. Yes, we can afford the financial expense.

Is it possible to have a LGBTQ person speak their heart/perspective at our meetings?

The Discernment Team's process called for one information-driven Town Hall. Our other gatherings are Living Room conversations where we will engage in dialogue that follows the model of a holy conversation. At the Town Hall we chose to invite Pastor Michael and Pastor John Wayne to share their hopeful vision of the future UMC and the forming GMC. The Discernment Team and Church Council did not consider an LGBTQ witness when developing our process.

If Covenant moves affiliation to a different denomination, will members of Covenant automatically become members of the new denomination?

Yes. Each individual's membership moves with the local church where their membership is held.

Why does Covenant have to vote to disaffiliate at all? We have heard of other local churches who are choosing not to vote. How did Covenant's decision to vote come to be? Or was this required of Covenant by the conference or another entity?

Covenant's Church Council voted unanimously to nominate a Discernment Team to develop a process through which Covenant would discern her future denominational affiliation. The Discernment Team developed the process and presented it to the Church Council where it was unanimously approved. Other congregation's leadership councils have voted to not enter a season of discernment.

Before the congregation, Jason Burnham talked about some UMC regions not following "some matters" in the Book of Discipline. Please be transparent and upfront about these "some matters" without people having to dig for the information. Otherwise, it feels like Covenant is one-sided and/or ignoring or hiding the facts (i.e., the denomination's current position on gay marriage and clergy). What SPECIFICALLY are these matters being raised and why have some regions/congregations chosen that path?

There was a priority on brevity for the short announcement of the "40 Days of Prayer for the Future of Covenant". In the extended 2-hour Town Hall deeper attention was given to "some matters" referring to the UMC affirmed definition of Christian marriage and the ordination requirements of fidelity in Christian marriage and celibacy in singleness.