

Good evening everyone. And welcome to this, uh, webinar. Uh, it's a privilege to be with you, and I'm happy that you're here tonight. And, uh, um, I've would like to begin our time together, uh, with the word of prayer. Would you pray with me God, today we give you thanks for this day for the blessings of the day, uh, for the gift of life, for the fullness that we've enjoyed on just this day today, we come to you and, uh, offer ourselves to you in this evening. Uh, we asked that you would, um, would grant us, um, just a piece that passes understanding, help us to walk with you, to be with you in ways and, um, help us tonight. As we gather to, uh, consider things that are before the church or coming before the church, we give you thanks. And we pray these things in Jesus name, amen

Friends. I'd like to start with just a brief, uh, word of devotion tonight. Just, um, thinking about, uh, the context of the day and where we are offer a word of encouragement and appreciation for you. This is a, a time that we've really struggled in these last couple of years. COVID has been, uh, in our midst. Uh, people have suffered job loss, the job market's changing. Uh, those of us who are in ministry know that the stress levels have gone up really high ministries changed, uh, uh, church participation, uh, patterns have changed. Uh, sometimes expectation levels are, are raised beyond, uh, really reasonable things. Sometimes we feel sad and discouraged and, and even depressed. We've experienced, uh, in our it, some of us, the death of family members, uh, friends, church people, and just in the last couple of weeks, we've, uh, watched the horrors of war unfold on, uh, television sets and news, uh, uh, reports.

Um, we're seeing inflation that hurts the poorest among us and, and now gas prices, uh, have gone through the roof. All those things add stress, and frankly, it's a tough time to be in ministry. Um, and it's a tough reason for many people, especially, uh, those who, uh, who, who have the least resources I've been reflecting on, um, verses that really mean a lot to me. And one verse that's come to mean a lot to me is, uh, found in second Corinthians four, eight and nine. Um, I really, I knew this first for a long time, but, uh, in, uh, I think about 19 seven, uh, 2017, uh, my brother who was two years younger than me was, was, uh, drowned in a fishing accident. Uh, he was in Colorado and one of those, uh, flash floods came through and unfortunately, uh, he didn't make it, uh, through that storm.

And, uh, these words, uh, came to me as I spoke about him in the Memorial service. And I just wanna share them with you tonight just to ground, uh, ground us in the hope of what, what we face. We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We're knocked down, but we aren't knocked out since I hang on to that. Ver especially when, uh, troubling times come and discouragement comes. And, um, just around, um, around the issues that we'll talk to about tonight, dis affiliation is stressful. The thought of the church dividing stressful, no general conference is stressful. We could go through a litany of things and, uh, really feel, uh, sad this morning. I was part of the council of Bishop's meeting and, uh, we had an update, uh, from our Bishop, uh, in, uh, Russia and Ukraine.

It's, uh, one area, uh, Bishop PGA told the council of bishops that he's grateful for the United Methodist connection for the many expressions of support that he's received support through UMCOR. And from the advanced specials, thankfully, he sends word that he is personally safe, but his heart is breaking. Uh, he is really questioning to, should my family evacuate, uh, and he's committed to stay because he sees the need on the ground. There are already 2 million people who've left Western Ukraine and our bishops in the east Eastern Europe have found those folks and connected them to the church. And we're making a difference. And I'm grateful for, for that grateful for you and your help with that. People in Eastern Ukraine are moving into Russia and, uh, those folks are displaced as well. And that's something that we don't hear about much here. People are, are stranded at the borders.

Uh, roads are block, cities are closed and more than 40 million people are still displaced. And many of 'em wanting to flee. Some of the pastors in Russia have received calls from the KGB and many pastors have received hate field messages. And he said, the effects are devastating. It's like living in Nazi,

Germany or Russia under stall. Uh, council was silent for several minutes. During that time of silence, many of us offered, um, the Bishop and those countries or prayers. The moment was really profound and it symbolizes the best of the church. As much as we seem to be divided and troubled oppressed, persecuted, confused. We are not crushed, depressed or abandoned. We may be knocked down. And frankly, when I think of our, they pale in comparison to having your whole life knocked out by war, but we are not blocked. We are not knocked out.

So hang on to that and know that pastors and churches, both I, I deeply, and they're really not words to convey this. I appreciate so much. I mean, industry that you are giving to people and I recognize it's sacrificial nature. Um, it's tough. It's a tough time, but, uh, we may be knocked down, but we are not knocked out. We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds that future. And so I invite you to be encouraged and, and hang in there, uh, serve the Lord, serve the people love, God, love the people. And, um, by that we fulfill our calling friends. As we gather tonight, I just wanna remind us of the vision of the church. And actually this may sound strange, but I have favorite paragraphs in the book of discipline. And, uh, they're probably not in some that I'll talk about later, but they're paragraph 1 21 21, 1 22 and 1 25.

And I would really encourage you to read one 20 to one 20 I've occasionally, if you've not read those before now, or you really gotta read 'em one 20, the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. I went through that quickly, but I would encourage you to think about that and spend some time on each word and just reflect on it. And what does that say to you? And the same is true for these other things too. The rationale for our mission is, uh, to make disciples for Jesus by proclaiming the good news of God, God's grace and exemplifying Jesus command to love God and neighbor and fulfill the, the mandate of the kingdom.

Um, our discipline in 1 21 lifts up two verses Matthew 28, uh, 19 to 20, and then 2237 to 39. And I really summarize it. And these words, these are just my summary words. Uh, love God, love people, make disciples and actually have added another one, make a difference. Uh, I think those are critically important for us. We it's so easy to lose our vision and why we're doing this in the first place. And I just encourage you to, uh, think about those things, think about our purpose and our mission as it's lived out and reported in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, the ministry of the prophets, and just know that our is embodied embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And it's experienced in the ongoing creation of new people by the holy spirit. That is a quote from our book of discipline. I encourage you to look at that and think about that. That's who we are. That's our vision, John Wesley, Philip OIN, Jacob Albright, and others, uh, understood the mission. And I love this statement when United Methodist had a clear sense of vision and mission, God has used our church to save persons, heal, relationships, transformed, social structures, and script holiness, thereby changing the world. That's a mandate.

I encourage us to, to find those positive things. I need positive motivators, and those are positive motivators. This is why we do this in the tough times. Uh, 1 22 outlines, how we do it. I don't wanna spend much time there. And 1 25 just talks about our connectional covenant. Its purpose is to support and hold each other accountable for faithful discipleship and mission. It, uh, holds together our connectional unity balances that with local freedom, we've got a lot of freedom and we've got a lot of unity that when we come together claim and embody the gospel, it can indeed change the world. Well, that's a book of discipline on the vision part, as far as I'm concerned. I want to transition now to talk about, uh, some of the news that we've received recently around the, the pending and now postponed general conference. As you know, it's been post a couple of times, uh, one called conference was canceled and the commission on general conference, uh, um, decided that, uh, we will postpone yet again, the 2020 general conference.

And for now that is postponed until 2024. Um, I do wanna report a little bit out of that meeting. Um, this does not violate confidentiality at this point. Um, and I wasn't privy to any of that. So this comes from a member, uh, of one of the bishops who was on it to reported the discussions were open and honest. The values that they utilized to make the decision were based on health, safety, and inclusion, uh, that both sides had a chance to share their opinions. The staff was open to various opinions in the end. 30% of the delegates could not be present at the general conference meeting the commission considered reducing the requirements to minimum, to meet a quorum, which would be 50%, uh, but elected, uh, to, uh, postpone the general conference because almost a third of the delegates could not come from the get go.

If we look at that from another perspective or put it another way, if general conference would've been held somewhere else in the world, and we couldn't have gotten there, we would've appreciated the same decision since it was held here and much easier for us. We, uh, we made discount the feelings of others for the sake of expediency general conference would have provided a line for disaffiliation in the denomination, not having a general conference, pushes the work down to the annual conference level. Unfortunately in the commission, a covenant of confidentiality wasn't kept news of the general conference was leaked by a member of the commission, a news organization's sent an unintended email stating their position, retracted the letter within minutes, and then sent the same communications two days later. That's tragic. It shouldn't happen in our church. Um, in the absence of general conference, recent general judicial council decision have essentially moved the DISA affiliation process to the level of the annual conference.

And the governance of that process is left to the individual annual conference. Um, that being said in summary, our policies, uh, for dis affiliation adopted by the Oklahoma conference, trustees are the ones that we abide by and will be administered under I'll delve into that a little bit more later in this webinar, before I go there, I just in weigh of overview, there is the potential that a jurisdictional conference might be called sometime later this year. And that conference will include, or may include, uh, the election of bishops. Um, the, the number of bishops covering additional Episcopal areas is very demanding and it's frankly unsustainable. And I'm one that, uh, is covering a, a part of another area, three conferences. And, uh, that is a, uh, a chore. Um, I'm gonna do it gladly, but the workload and the ability to, uh, you know, is, uh, is quite demanding example yesterday.

I spent the day with the Oklahoma cabinet. Uh, this morning I spent the morning with the council of bishops this afternoon. I spent it with, um, with the Northwest Texas conference cabinet and immediate, prior to this webinar, I was with the Oklahoma Indian missionary conference. So, uh, if I'm not careful, I may appoint somebody to the wrong conference and not even realize it, but, uh, seriously, it is hard to keep things straight. Uh, but I, I have been working hard on it and the task is made so much easier because of the outstanding leaders that we have in each conference. And especially here in Oklahoma, I wanna highlight and express my appreciation to our staff and our, uh, superintendents who do absolutely fantastic work. Uh, I cannot say in enough good about our folks that enables me to do this other work that, um, that were they not there and colleagues in other conferences having equal, um, uh, capabilities.

Um, this would be an utter disaster, but because of their work, we're able to do it. I want to transition now, things have changed some in Oklahoma. Uh, the last webinar, I had a question, uh, if any churches that engaged the disaffiliation process and that has changed, and I wanna be, uh, upfront with you about changes as they come. As of now, we have two churches that are in the process, and I am going to follow the policy both tonight and in the future that I will not be commenting on individual churches or their standing as related to the process. Uh, I do wanna make it clear that every pastor in every church is in a connectional covenant and each person and entity is under the authority of that covenant. And so,

um, I wanna honor that accountability, uh, also applies to me in that I should not be talking about your church publicly or any other church.

And so I'm gonna hold, um, comments about any local specific thing, uh, and will not be, uh, be sharing information on those or opinions. Either one, I do to say that I value every church and every pastor, and I don't want anybody to, uh, leave United Methodist church of the Oklahoma conference, but just because I may want something doesn't mean it comes to pass. And so above all, I wanna be respectful for persons, uh, seek to understand their motives and perspectives and acknowledge the objectivity of the discipline, uh, and apply it with impartiality. Also wanna say that I have no plans to lead the United Methodist church and have the intention to continue to serve as your Episcopal leader, at least through the next general conference. And, uh, that time, you know, uh, everyone makes their decisions on what's next. Um, but, uh, certainly I serve at the pleasure and the assignment of the, uh, committee of episcopy and the jurisdictional conference of which that, uh, that, uh, committee is a part.

I don't want any church to disaffiliate, but what I want doesn't really matter. Um, what, what I really desire is for people to be able to follow their conscience. And, uh, and if, if the United Methodist church is not the place, uh, for that to be, uh, be available, then, uh, it's to help people get to where they need to be. Our Oklahoma conference board of trustees have adopted a policy that allows engagement with the process and resolution that is fair both to the local church and to the connection. Um, we, uh, we need to think about fairness, uh, in both of those ways. What's fair for the church and what's fair to our community or our connection that in mind, I want to discuss, uh, just a couple of ways to, uh, to disaffiliate. Um, I do want, I don't want to comment a whole lot on, uh, on what other organizations do, but I think it's important, uh, to say, uh, this from the outset that the GMC, the global Methodist church is promoting and it's, uh, literature and it's, uh, it's, uh, provisions that there are three ways, uh, by which a church can disaffiliate and they are utilizing paragraphs 25, 48 0.2 25 49 0.3 or 25 53.

And, uh, so those are three things that actually we have in common. I read the discipline the same way, and I'm in the company of the council of bishops as well in that interpretation. Um, however I do, uh, uh, reject the first one, uh, 25 48 0.2, uh, about, uh, the concept, the whole concept of a pan Methodist grew was first created and, and placed in the discipline in 1948. And frankly, the history of that provision was, and its intent was to coerce African American churches to leave the Methodist churches and go elsewhere. Now I realized times have changed in the meaning has changed a little. It hadn't been updated, but, uh, I really do not want to be a party and cannot really be a party to such racist and sinful concepts that urge us to O and that would urge us to, uh, I would urge us to omit that paragraph from our list of possibilities.

It doesn't really change things very much. Uh, there still are two ways by which one can exit, um, the first way. And the recommended way is paragraph 25, 53. Uh, you have to find that in the addendum to the 19, uh, uh, 2016 book of discipline, and, um, you can find that on the internet. In fact, you can find all these references on the internet, if you, if you care to look for 'em that way, that one I'm gonna call the dis affiliation, um, paragraph. And then there's a second way, which is 25 49 0.3. And, uh, that is basically exigent circumstances that can be used. Um, let me contrast the two, uh, DISA affiliation under 25, 53 is a connectional process approved by the trustees and the trustee, uh, guide around that, uh, is set forth by the conference and our, um, our director of transition ministries is, uh, Dr.

Tish Maloy. And, uh, she has an excellent team of people who are assembled and working with her they're people from every perspective and some may disaffiliate some point and that's okay, and others may not, and that's okay, but we've tried to create a fair balanced, uh, group and process that, uh, that can be followed. Um, disaffiliation, as I repeat as a connectional process, Exogen search circumstance is a unilateral breakaway action taken by church. Another point of contrast, uh, dis affiliation process is one that is open the, is open. Everybody can see the steps in it. Uh, it's clearly outlined, and we expect

communication to be fair, open and honest in exigent circumstances. There's often secrets, uh, controlled information it's, uh, partial information or biased, or in inaccurate ed, uh, information is given about both facts, uh, the discipline processes and communication, frankly, it's deceitful. And, uh, and, and these kind of characteristics will be what would get a church, even though they may ask for dis affiliation under 25, 53 could get a church assigned to an Exogen circumstance under 25, 49 0.3.

I hope not to go that direction because it raises the stakes. And, uh, and that's just not the way I want to go or would encourage us to go. But on the other hand, we are in a connection and if it appears that the connection's gonna be treated unfairly, uh, that would be an outcome. Uh, another contrast, the values this, uh, 25 53 values, the connectional covenant and accountability, 25 49 0.3 regard, disregard those things. Another clergy remain in the UMC through disaffiliation, uh, under 25, 49 0.3 clergy do not remain in good standing. And I refer you to paragraph 360.1, which says that a clergy who leaves the church must withdraw. There is no provision in the book of discipline to transfer clergy orders to another denomination, uh, through, um, through DISA affiliation. Uh, there are processes that we can work that out where the transition is seamless, uh, in accident circumstances, the process will be much more, much more difficult, uh, laity remain in the United Methodist church and trail transferred till they transferred or elect to be transferred, or an adequate provision is made and, uh, exigent circumstances they can transfer, uh, under provisions of paragraph two 40, uh, under disaffiliation the trustees established terms and conditions under, uh, accident circumstances, the trust clause establishes terms and conditions.

Very important difference. And if you don't understand that, please ask the question question, uh, that, uh, call Dr. Maloy and get, uh, get some input around that. Um, dis affiliation includes provision for unfunded liabilities, um, especially around pensions accident. Circumstances, provisions for UN funded liabilities are not waived, and that is found in an addendum paragraph 1504 0.23, um, dis affiliation helps us to ensure that your pension is protected in full, uh, 25, 49 0.3 places, the conference at risk for funding. So, uh, you can tell, I am biased toward 25 53, because I think our trustees have done an excellent job, uh, working with this, it is a working process. And currently that is not on the website because we have a meeting, uh, to update that, uh, which is going to basically bring it in line with the latest rulings of the judicial council, and, uh, want to make sure that, uh, everything in our process aligns it's been tested.

And, uh, we don't get caught up, uh, in, uh, snags that can, uh, derail things create unnecessary hardships or hard feelings afterwards. I will say that I'm willing to work with churches who may begin on one path and realize that they may need to make an adjustment to, from one paragraph to the other. Um, at some point there's a place of no return. Um, but, um, I, I just really encourage, I can't encourage enough open dialogue. You're not gonna be penalized just for calling and asking a question or even engaging in a disaffiliation process or inquiry. Um, we're really not about punitive stuff. I know people don't wanna believe that it seems like, uh, but that certain me, I hope you would hear my heart around that. And I think that that is shared by our staff, our superintendents, our trustees, and our policies. I wanna conclude this part by reminding you that, uh, we have set aside the dates for a called annual conference October 21st and 22nd for the purpose of addressing matters of disaffiliation.

And, uh, to the point on that, uh, every church that disaffiliate must be approved by an annual conference vote. And, uh, we cannot be ready in time, uh, for churches to go through the process and engage all that in time for may. And so we will have a called annual conference in October, uh, to address that. And, um, then there'll be some other matters, uh, likely we'll, uh, we will withhold budget until a later time, uh, and, uh, just watch for details on that. Uh, but if you'll just hold the dates now for October 21st and 22nd, um, we will, uh, we will do that at that point. I think at this point, I wanna take a

breath and, and, uh, get a sip of water. And, uh, I've got a questions in front of me and I'll just address as many as I can.

The first question that I've got, oh, excuse me, I've talked too much today. Uh, first question is kind of conference voted out of the United Methodist church or only individual churches. And then second to that as Northwest Texas conference voted out, uh, let me say to you that I've worked with the council of bishops and there was a press release that I believe went out today. I got a copy of it. And the council has asked for an expedited ruling from the judicial council on that very question, uh, raised that in the council advocated for it, because, uh, I think that it's a fair question that must be, uh, answered, uh, my answer to it today, uh, is that an annual conference does not have that, right. Uh, the argument against that is in Des, uh, 1366. And, uh, it states that a church does, but then puts qualifiers on that, that the general conference must make a way for that to happen.

General conference has not met and made way for that to happen. And there are other constitutional, uh, paragraphs that, uh, that I, I could go to, uh, and, uh, support that as well. So, uh, my answer today is that as of now an annual conference does not have the right, uh, to, to, uh, vote itself out, uh, such a motion would be out of order. Um, but the question has gone to the, uh, judicial council. And I hope that we have an answer for that, uh, by annual conference. Uh, the second part of that is Northwest Texas voted out, uh, in quotes, voted out the answer to that is no, they had a straw poll vote on what would the conference want to do. It was not unanimous. Uh, and, um, it was, well, I won't comment beyond that. The answer is no, I am working with Northwest Texas on these same things.

And we spent the day to day when we should have been making appointments working on these matters in that conference. We've also worked on 'em very extensively in Oklahoma. So if you're waiting for your appointment phone to ring, know that we have been, uh, working with these waity matters as well as trying to make, uh, spiritual informed, uh, sensitive decisions on pastoral leadership. Uh, we know this is important in your life, on where you serve and where you're appointed and, um, and take that very, very, very seriously. Um, okay. It's announced that, uh, question another question it's announced that the global Methodist church will launch in may with the Oklahoma conference that same month, what plans are in place to continue? The work of the annual conference is churches and lady depart. The reason we're having a call annual conference in October is so that we can deal with the work of the annual in may.

And we wanna work with the, I mean, really exciting programs that we've got coming. There are several initiatives that are, are just super creative. Um, we've got such a wonderful group of leaders that are creative thinking outside that proverbial box on, on what can we do and what is God calling us to do? And frankly, I wish we had a webinar about that whole thing. I think it would be a lot more fun and a lot more inspiring. And, uh, so, um, just keep those dates for annual conference on your calendar and, uh, and make sure to come. Um, I want us skip, uh, now to another, uh, topic of this one's, uh, with the LGBTQ, assuming that the split in the U C eventually comes about, will the discipline be used by remaining churches, likely have to be modified through yet another general conference to possibly remove the language barring LGBTQ persons from full inclusion.

Um, the answer to that is that, uh, the petitions are submitted every time we have a general conference. And so anyone, any member of the United Methodist church can submit a petition about any, anything, and it would not surprised me at all. If these matters would be on the agenda for the next general conference, I've been to enough general conferences to know that, uh, you cannot predict the outcome on anything. And, uh, it's usually, uh, debated in a full, robust manner. And, uh, so, um, I would just say that that would likely be an issue that comes before the general conference. Uh, I just don't try to predict votes. So, um, I think that's about all I can say on that one. The next, uh, topic is around clergy.

We have a, uh, we have a number of core doc in the UMC among them, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection of the Trinity that of course is not exhaustive.

Are you or the board of ministry aware of clergy who deny these core tenants? In other words, is this a problem across the conference? Would this be something addressed by the board of ministry? The answer to that is yes. The board of ministry has us, uh, questions that are screened. I, uh, actually, uh, if I have my discipline here, yes, I do. Um, every person that's ordained is asked this question, have, have you faith in Christ? Um, uh, let's see. Do you know the general rules of our church? Will you keep them, have you studied the doctrines of the United Methodist church after full examination? Do you believe our doctrines are in harmony with the holy scriptures? Will you preach and maintain them these and other questions or ask, well, have you studied our form discipline and polity? Do you approve our church, government and polity?

Will you support and maintain them? Will you diligently instruct the children in every place will you visit from house to house? Will you recommend fasting or abstinence? Both by precepting example? Uh, there are a couple of other questions, but that's enough to illustrate the point. Uh, the relationships with the annual conference are the responsibility of the board of, or name ministry. Uh, the Bishop does not screen those people. That is the work of the board, the Bishop, and the captain appoint the people who are approved by the board to serve well, actually recommended by the board approved at the executive session to serve. So, um, that's a basic answer on that one. Um, I would basically say that in terms of the core doctrines, I, I have not had anybody wanna sit down with me and say, I don't believe in the divinity of Christ or the resurrection or the Trinity.

Um, so I, I really, uh, do not believe we have, uh, people that are ordained that, uh, that at least are expressing that to me. And I haven't had complaints about that coming from local churches. Uh, the next question, how would the annual conference navigate a pastor in good standing who wants to terminate their membership in the annual conference and, uh, surrender their credentials. I'm actually going to correct that to the discipline language and withdraw to and withdraw from the United Methodist church, uh, to unite with another denomination. Uh, but the church doesn't want to disaffiliate. We would basically treat that. Let's say the pastor wants to disaffiliate. The church does not. That would be just like somebody retiring. Uh, and we have an open church that needs to have a pastor appointed. Who's a member of the annual conference and, uh, in good standing.

So you would, if you're, if the, if a, if a current pastor wanted to disaffiliate, that would be effective on whatever that effective date is the next day I would expect, well, the next day there will be a provision for that local church, either on an interim or a permanent basis. Uh, and I'll parenthetically say we deal with that every month of, of the whole year in cabinet. That's one of the purposes of a appointed cabinet. Let's see. Another question. If a more conservative pastor stays in the ums C and the words of the person quote, after the smoke clears and the dust settles, will there still be a home for me in the, um, C um, that is forward looking. So it's hard to, hard to, uh, to follow. I mean, it's hard to predict, um, and I'm just shooting straight with you. But my answer is yes, I believe there will be, um, will there be a home for people in UMC that, where that allows certain other people to maybe look at things differently?

Uh, that's what each individual's got to decide is, uh, how, um, is the way the denomination looks at various issues. Something that I can live with, even if I'm in respectful disagreement on it. And I will tell you folks, I'm in respectful disagreement with several points in the discipline today. I don't really want to go into all those on the webinar, but, uh, you, my wife and I don't agree with everything we never have, and we never will, but we still have a commitment to each other. That for us is a, is a lifetime commitment. So yeah, if you want there to be a place for you, there will be, if you don't there won't be, it's really on your shoulders. Um, re next question, retire, pastors relate to a particular UMC

congregation for charge pop conference purposes. If that congregation decides to leave the United Methodist church and relate to the GC, and I'm gonna put our parenthesis somewhere else, well, there's still bear a home for me in the, um, C um, as of today, uh, retired, LRG do need to affiliate with a charge conference.

Um, and that, that is what keeps one in good standing, um, as for future legislation that could change I suppose, but I deal with reality and not what might be. And so I would suggest that if a congregation left, you know, at Methodist church and a retired clergy wish to remain affiliated with United Methodist church, that would require, uh, aligning, uh, one's self with a, a United Methodist church, uh, charge conference. And, uh, that certainly is a clear and safe answer, um, beyond the out I wouldn't, uh, I wouldn't wanna speculate, what would I say to seminary students who are graduating in 2024? Uh, congratulations first. And, uh, what is God calling you too in this next, in the next, in this next chapter of your life? That's what I'd say. And I'd say, uh, there, that God is not through with the church and you need to examine closely the, uh, the doctrines, the discipline, um, the politic, uh, and, uh, the practices of any church.

I would say this today, before you join it. And, you know, we just, we ask the questions, have you studied our discipline and doctrines? And do you agree with them? Well, that's an essential question for anybody. So that's what students who graduate in 2024 need to ask. Um, and frankly that's what, uh, everybody needs to ask. We get to the point of DISA affiliation and questions next, and I'll just bridge this answer into that next one. Um, if there comes a time where you say no, uh, to the, to the questions, it probably is time to consider disaffiliation. Um, but, uh, but for everybody, that's, uh, that's a personal, uh, you know, you've gotta be guided by what you think God's calling you to do at this day of your life. And I would, I would really urge you to tune out the politics around it, uh, to not believe the PR stuff that, uh, the bullet points that get posted or sent around or stuff like that.

You do your own work and get out the book of discipline and read it. Um, I, I mean, you know, I didn't read that to start tonight just to say, well, this is just a book and it's not worth anything. I would, I'm sorry, I'm getting off on a tangent. I would really, uh, do my due diligence, just like I were buying a house or a car or picking a career or picking a spouse. I would do that same due diligence on picking a church and, uh, an and a place to answer called ministry on my life or to raise my children. And my family in these questions are about dis affiliation. So let me jump to those right quick. And how are we doing on time? Got a few more minutes here. Y'all ask a whole bunch of questions. I know I'm not gonna get through all of 'em and we'll have to do, uh, some frequently asked questions, some responses here later, um, the, a conference board of trustees are in charge of the DISA affiliation process.

What is your role in that? My role in that is, uh, it depends on the paragraph and 25 53 does not require, um, my, uh, signature, uh, 20, uh, uh, 25 49 does. So it depends on the paragraph. Um, my, my role, basically in the DISA affiliation process with a local church under 25 53, uh, is, uh, non-existent well, it's not quite that non-existent, but I'm not active in that process. I'll put it that way. Uh, who does the negotiating to ensure that our Oklahoma conference is not financially hurt by the decision? Well, that's the work of CFA. That's the work of the corporation that work of our trustees. That's the work of our, uh, conference board of pensions and health benefits. Uh, that's the work of our treasurer. That's the work of our conference staff, our superintendents and myself. Uh, when I mentioned earlier that we're in a connected, we're in a connectional system, and we're a connected together.

We're not a group of end of VIG churches. We've gotta look at the whole as well as to the local church. And, uh, so we are attempting to look at this from a holistic perspective. Um, that being said, I don't want to fool everybody into thinking, oh, this isn't gonna be anything. It probably is gonna be some hurt and some pain, uh, um, but our task is to keep our commitments whole. And frankly, when people say, how much is it gonna cost for us to get out? Um, that is a, that is a negative and cynical way of asking,

uh, the question that this turns actually around. Um, we don't ask this in a Punit way. We are asking, we are asking the question, what does the conference need to be whole? And what does the conference need to meet its obligations? Some of those have been built up for 40 years or more, uh, by pension years of service and pension and accrual.

And we have got to ask a question, can we with integrity, maintain those obligations? And that, that actually, frankly comes ahead of a local church and their desire to, uh, disaffiliate. So that's the reason it's not a punitive thing. It's a, are we protecting our brothers and sisters we've served with for, for 40 50 years or whatever? My, my own personal heritage and Methodism goes back 10 generations. And so we have generations upon generations, people that we're responsible for. We're not here just by ourselves. And so that's what this is all about. How are the assets owned by the Oklahoma conference handled? I would encourage you to, uh, depends on the asset. Our board of trustees, uh, is responsible, uh, for those, they are overseen by our treasurer. Our CFNA watches those things, uh, for every, uh, dollar we have an account. Uh, we have an accountability for that.

There's a bank account for dollars. We don't have, have Phantom dollars floating around on the book somewhere and no money that matches up to that. Um, we've done actually an outstanding job in the past, uh, three years reorganizing the, the finances of the annual conference, um, and, uh, and getting all of these things in place. We've had clean audits and, uh, with the exception of property, which we don't put property on the books, but from a, from a gap perspective, except for itemizing all of our property, we've got an absolutely clean stellar record. And, uh, if you've got a question I invite you to call, um, our, our treasurer Joel Holt, or, uh, um, anyone else, uh, uh, uh, can answer those kinds of things. That's too broad of a question for me to answer specifically, but I'll ask you to go to that. What, what happens to clergy status, uh, as churches are in disaffiliation, if it's under, and I said this before, if it's under 25 53, then the clergy remain, uh, in, in the conference in good standing. If, uh, if a church does a unilateral action, uh, and, uh, then under, uh, 25 40, um, three, and then it's under the exigent provisions. Um, there are different outcomes around that, and it depends. So, uh, let's see, let me go to general conference questions. Now,

Let me get another drink. Would the general conference ever consider holding special regional general conferences? How many more times can we delay general conference? What if 2024 gets postponed as well? Um, regional conferences are not, uh, regional general conferences do not exist. There's no provision for that, uh, jurisdictional conferences. The next thing in line around that. And if we don't have a general conference, the, the book of discipline does not get changed. Um, uh, the other questions, I don't know, um, 15 or the next question

Is the protocol for separation developed in 2019, still being considered as a guide for amicable separation or churches aligning with the new GMC going to be, I'm sorry. Uh, I'm gonna rephrase this question. Uh, because part of it is written in such a hostile that I'm not going to dignify putting that out there. Um, I went over this in 25, 53, um, that, uh, the dis affiliation process in 25 53 allows a church to keep its property. I didn't cover that specifically, but since the question asked that, uh, it does allow the church to keep the property. Uh, the dis affiliation is guided by the policy of the trustees under accident circumstances in 25, 49 0.3. Uh, the trust clause will guide that process is a new slate of delegates gonna be elected for the newly postponed general conference, or we're gonna have new elections. Uh, currently that is a question somewhat in debate. Uh, the, the, uh, uh, see Gary Graves is a secretary for the general conference and the lead on the commission for the general conference stated that the conference is postponed when it's postponed. That means the same delegates, um, are, um, the same delegates elected currently elected will serve in a postponed conference in the event that the 2020 conference is canceled. And that could happen upon review by the general, uh, judicial council. Then we will have elections for new delegates.

Uh, pension has Wes path officially said that they will accept unfunded liabilities. The churches will it's joined the GMC N not to my knowledge. Um, I think all of that's gotta be CA be in discussion and I'm not privy to those discussions. So I can't, uh, comment beyond that. I think that's an aspiration, but, uh, but as far as receiving any, uh, uh, actual factual, this is true, or this is not true. I have not received that. So I can't answer that question. I would rather be straight up with you and tell you, I can't answer it than, than answer it. And, or guess how is the unfunded liability gonna be calculated? Unfunded liabilities are not an exact science. Okay, I'm gonna skip some of that. Um, yeah, unfunded liabilities are calculated by the general board of well by west path, which is general board of pension health benefits is the old name.

And, uh, that's calculated on a monthly basis and figured for an annual conference. So annual conferences receive an amount and that amount has several factors. Um, I think for this purpose, I'm not gonna go into the details of those factors. Although if you want more information on that, we'll put that in an FAQ. Uh, but, uh, you, um, basically we receive a, an amount for the, the conference monthly and, uh, then, uh, currently our trustees have the policy that that'll be averaged over six months to help take some of the fluctuation of the market, uh, out of those calculations. Uh, but, uh, we, we calculate those according to the decimal. So whatever your appointment or whatever your church decimal is, you'll take the total number that is assigned to the conference as, uh, its unfunded liability and multiply that by your decimal, that will get you there for the pension.

There's a second, uh, uh, unfunded liability. And that is the retiree health supplement, uh, that is actually, uh, year to year determined by the annual conference. Uh, and, uh, and that is figured in the same way we were given an actuarial amount at as well. And, uh, we'll have more information for that at the annual conference, uh, as we consider that policy and our conference policy directly affects that, uh, the unfunded, uh, portion of the retire health benefit, uh, the, um, the pensions benefit is not affected by annual conference P policy, uh, that is determined by west path policy.

Okay. 20, I'm gonna skip, well, I'll read it. I don't, I don't, I may have to, I'm having to navigate this one as I go have the trustees considered extend, extending a promissory, no, to a church wishing to leave under 25 48 0.2 for the churches' actual portion of its pension amount as invoiced by west path to the Oklahoma conference, as opposed to a lump sum payment based on a formula determined by the conference. Well, I just think I just answered that question. It's based on a formula. Uh, I am not really willing to do 25 48 0.2, unless that's just really expedient, uh, for some reason, 25, 53, and following our process is better. Um, I will say that, uh, I do not believe that any church will be eligible that any church that wants to disaffiliate will be eligible to be, to be voted on at the annual conference until all matters relating to dis affiliation are fulfilled.

So that basically says that, uh, that, uh, payment in full will be due before an annual conference vote. And no church is actually disaffiliated without annual conference vote. That's the last step in the process. Okay. What's the need for the special called session of the annual conference? The SP the purpose is to address matters of DISA affiliation, and, um, uh, it requires a vote of the annual conference, uh, as I just said to, uh, for a church to actually disaffiliate, um, I expect all the work done ahead of time for disaffiliating churches will be done, and that will be available before the conference. And, uh, we still are working on how we'll actually do that. Uh, but at any rate it requires a yes or no vote, um, by the annual conference. It's not amendable. And, uh, so I think I've answered that question. I think I got through all the questions that are before me, and it's eight o'clock on the dot.

Uh, there are likely other questions that are coming in, and I just encourage you to, to send those in and, uh, we'll work on those and have some FAQs and a document up for that pretty soon. Um, I do certainly appreciate, um, all of you and your work here, um, and your work in the church. And, uh, I'd like the privilege to pray us out. So let us pray God, as we have, uh, talked through many things tonight, I just

pray most of all that your, uh, your holy spirit would be upon our churches and upon our people on our pastors. And, uh, regardless where one is in this whole matter. Um, I pray for a piece that passes understanding, and I pray for hearts that are filled with compassion, uh, for, for not only people who are like us, but people who are unlike us, not only for people who agree with us and, and are on the same side, uh, in the matter, but for the people who disagree, even though we can't agree, maybe not, uh, open our hearts toward one another and, uh, bless one another and wish the best for one another.

God, we give ourselves to you. Now, we pray for your blessing in every, in the name of Christ. We pray, amen. Have a good night. God bless you. I'm praying for you.