

Date: June 1, 2023 at 5:06 PM  
Subject: Important Announcement

Scroll down for message:



Dear First Church family,

As you are aware, we have been working diligently to try to resolve our disaffiliation issue with the conference. Your Administrative Council and the other committees have earnestly been attempting to come to an amicable resolution with the conference through recent negotiations. However, we are now at an impasse and are unable to achieve a resolution that would allow us to disaffiliate while at the same time keep our facility and resources.

As I have stated from the beginning of the discernment process, our intent is to follow God's direction for our church. In so doing, we believe that we are now left with no other options than to initiate a lawsuit, including a motion for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) against the conference that will allow us to seek to disaffiliate. By going this route, we acknowledge that there is a good possibility it will draw media attention to our church. As such we believe it is in our best interest to attempt to control the narrative by issuing a press release shortly after filing of the lawsuit and a motion for a TRO. We anticipate this to occur in the next few days.

Please know that we have prayed extensively over this decision, and we do not take this step lightly. Please know that your Admin Council's primary concern is the spiritual health and welfare of our congregation and the future of our ministry here at First Church. Each and every one of you is a cherished and valued member of the First Church family and we ask you to continue to be in prayer throughout this process.

Below is the press release that will be submitted to the media. We wanted you

to be aware prior to releasing this information to the media.

May God's peace and blessings be upon each of us as we proceed down this path.

In His Name,  
David Hancock, Chair  
First Church Administrative Council

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## **FIRST CHURCH FILES LAWSUIT TO SEPARATE FROM UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**“We have exhausted every other avenue.”**

### **OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (June 01, 2023)**

First Church in downtown Oklahoma City has filed suit in Oklahoma County District Court to formally separate itself from the United Methodist Church (UMC). First Church hopes to join the 84 other Methodist churches in Oklahoma which have already disaffiliated from the UMC with their property. However, unlike the 84 other cases, First Church's exit has been met with strong and unfair resistance.

“We never wanted to take this issue to court but we have exhausted every other avenue,” says First Church Member, Hardy Patton. “At least 75% of our congregation expressed a desire to disaffiliate, which is well above the 66% threshold, so we expected a relatively seamless transition. Unfortunately, leaders within our governing body have unfairly impeded our departure by deliberately ignoring their own rules and procedures. We allege their motive is greed. Our property, located in downtown Oklahoma City, is quite valuable and they do not want our congregation to have it.”

First Church is suing the *Oklahoma Annual Conference* which is the UMC's governing body for its churches in the state. The UMC is not named as a defendant.

“The doors of First Church have been open to the people of Oklahoma City since 1889 -- long before the UMC and its governing boards existed,” Patton says. “It would be a tragedy to allow greed to shutter our doors after we have continuously served Oklahomans for more than 130 years. We are an active and financially self-sufficient church that has always been dedicated to our community. Even though we voted to part ways with UMC, the purpose of our lawsuit is not to settle a spiritual dispute. This is simply a property dispute. We have no animosity or ill will toward UMC. We are only asking to leave the UMC with our property so we can continue serving our community in peace.”

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