



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

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

### **OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (June 1, 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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**For more information, please contact Andrew Speno at 405-315-5924.**

**Link: [First Church v. Oklahoma Annual Conference Filing](#)** (not attached to draft)