

LIFESTYLE

Last chance? More Oklahoma churches to seek United Methodist Church exit at third meeting



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Two Oklahoma City metro houses of worship and several Eastern Oklahoma megachurches are among more than 40 churches seeking to formally exit the United Methodist Church in a special meeting set for Oct. 13-14 in Oklahoma City.

The disaffiliation gathering to be held at Oklahoma City Community College, 7777 S May, is the last of three planned special disaffiliation meetings called by the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference, a regional United Methodist affiliate led by the Rev. Jimmy Nunn. So far, 84 churches have ended their affiliation with the denomination – 29 at a special conference in October 2022 and 55 at a special conference in April 2023.

This third round of exit-seeking churches is part of a widening schism in the international United Methodist Church – one of Oklahoma's largest faith groups. Disagreement about the scriptural compatibility of same-sex marriage and the ordination of openly gay clergy is at the heart of the divide. The issues are coming to a head for many churches, prompting them to seek to leave the denomination. The catalyst for the current disaffiliation trend appears to be Paragraph 2553, a special provision added to the United Methodist Book of Discipline, a policy book. The provision allows for churches who disagree with the United Methodist Church's stance on human sexuality to disaffiliate and take their property and assets with them. Paragraph 2553 remains in effect until Dec. 31, 2023, so some churches appear to be trying to break away before this provisional deadline.

The current crop of churches that wish to disaffiliate must have their disaffiliation requests ratified by Oklahoma United Methodist delegates who will gather at the Oct. 13-14 meeting before their affiliation with the denomination will be considered formally severed.

Which Oklahoma churches want to leave?

The 44 churches hoping to sever United Methodist ties Oct. 13-14 are: Adair United Methodist, First United Methodist-Ada, Atoka United Methodist, Allen United Methodist, First United Methodist-Broken Arrow, Chelsea Epworth United Methodist, Cherokee United Methodist and Copan United Methodist.

Also: Eagletown United Methodist, East Cross United Methodist-Bartlesville, Foyil United Methodist, Grove United Methodist, Highland United Methodist, Hydro United Methodist, Helena United Methodist, Jenks United Methodist, Jet United Methodist, Lamont United Methodist, Lucien United Methodist, Mosaic United Methodist, Morning Star United Methodist and Mustang United Methodist.

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Others include: New Zion United Methodist, First United Methodist-Owasso, Pawhuska United Methodist, Prairie Valley United Methodist, Sand Springs United Methodist, Sapulpa United Methodist, Sycamore Chapel United Methodist, Snyder United Methodist, Sulphur United Methodist, Talihina United Methodist, Tishomingo United Methodist and Tuttle United Methodist.

Also: Texhoma United Methodist, Thomas United Methodist, Christ United Methodist-Tulsa, Valliant United Methodist, Wagoner United Methodist, Waukomis United Methodist, Waynoka United Methodist, First United Methodist-Woodward, Wetumka United Methodist and Wright City United Methodist.



Most of the Oklahoma churches severing their connection to the United Methodist Church are often described as conservative or traditionalist congregations that agree with the denomination's current ban on same-sex marriage and gay clergy but they are seeking to exit because they believe the faith group is headed in a more liberal direction.

Among Oklahoma City metro area churches seeking to leave the denomination in this third meeting is First United Methodist Church of Mustang, with 82.9% of the members voting in May to disaffiliate, according to the church's website.

Mosaic United Methodist, one of only two Oklahoma houses of worship exiting to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community, gathers for worship in Oklahoma City. Mosaic members took a disaffiliation vote in August, with 89% of the members voting to sever denominational ties.

St. Luke's, with locations including Oklahoma City and Edmond, has been the only other Oklahoma church whose leadership has said the congregation sought to exit in order to be more LGBTQ+ inclusive. St. Luke's disaffiliated in April.

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Meanwhile, several large Tulsa area churches in terms of membership (according to the United Methodist Church 2021 database at UMDData.org) are among those seeking to exit at the final planned disaffiliation meeting. First United Methodist Church of Broken Arrow and First United Methodist Church of Owasso are hoping to disaffiliate at the coming gathering at OCCC. This is noteworthy because some of the churches that were among the largest United Methodist houses of worship in Oklahoma have already cut ties, including St. Luke's, Asbury in Tulsa, Claremore and New Covenant in Edmond.