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In United Methodist disaffiliation, exiting liberal churches a surprising minority

LGBTQ+- affirming church in OKC seeks United Methodist exit



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As the schism in the international United Methodist Church widens, more and more conservative congregations are heading for the exit doors in a trend that has confounded those on the outside looking in.

Why are conservative houses of worship leaving the denomination when they generally agree with the denomination's ban on same-sex marriage and gay ordination? Why aren't more liberal churches departing – after all, many of them have been expressing their opposition to the prohibition for years?

Into this conundrum comes Mosaic United Methodist Church, 3131 NW 50. The congregation's leaders said they can't speak for other churches that have been fighting for LGBTQ+ equality, but they can share why they now want out.



"We're tired," said the Rev. Glenda Skinner-Noble, 50, Mosaic's associate pastor.

Nearly 100 churches have sought to leave UMC, but Mosaic is only second to want more LGBTQ+ inclusion

Mosaic is only the second of 84 congregations in Oklahoma seeking an exit because church members want to be more inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community. Notably, St. Luke's disaffiliated in April for similar reasons, but

unlike St. Luke's, 222 NW 15, Mosaic members have publicly advocated for the LGBTQ+ community since the church evolved from the now defunct Epworth United Methodist. Epworth was and Mosaic is a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network of churches, individuals and faith groups working toward the full inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in the United Methodist Church.



Mosaic leaders said the congregation is choosing to exit before a special provision ends on Dec. 31, which allows United Methodist churches in disagreement over human sexuality to take their property and assets with them when they sever ties with the denomination. One leader said the provision, known as Paragraph 2553, was created with LGBTQ+-affirming churches like Mosaic in mind.

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"I feel like we were the type of church that this was designed for," said Susan Humphrey, 70, a Mosaic church council member.

"We have discussed this for so long, and it's taken a lot of our focus and energy. Now that we've made this decision, I personally feel like we are free to be who we are."

The church recently held a congregational vote, and 89.7% of the church members voted in favor of disaffiliation, meeting the two-thirds majority vote required by the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference under a Paragraph 2553 disaffiliation agreement. Mosaic will be among a group of churches hoping to have their disaffiliation requests ratified by Oklahoma United Methodist Conference delegates on Oct. 13-14 at a special disaffiliation meeting. This ratification must occur before churches may formally separate from the denomination.



The Rev. Scott Spencer, Mosaic's senior pastor, agreed with Skinner-Noble's summary of the congregation's sentiments.

"Many of the people at Mosaic were part of Epworth, and they've been sort of working on this since at least 1995," he said. "Some of those people were the ones that just said 'we're tired and we're ready for change.'"

An Oklahoma United Methodist Conference leader who has been working with disaffiliating congregations shared an assessment about the "gracious exit" provision that lined up with Mosaic leaders' views.

"Paragraph 2553, the legislation that narrowly passed by the worldwide General Conference of the UMC in 2019, was intended to allow a gracious exit with property and assets held in trust for the whole UMC for congregations that were in disagreement with the current position of the church on homosexuality. The current stance is not to allow our clergy to officiate same gender weddings or to allow the ordination of 'self-avowed practicing homosexuals,'" Patricia "Tish" Malloy, the conference's director of transitional ministries, said in an email.



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Malloy said the legislation allowed congregations that voted by a 2/3 majority of present members to request ratification of their vote by their area conference and the conference to determine whether to or not to release the property and assets of that church to the congregation.

"Of course, anyone can decide that they do not approve of a denomination's position on any matter and leave, but this legislation really was originally

intended to allow congregations that were predominantly supportive of full inclusion of homosexual people to leave the UMC and own buildings and other assets as a gift from the UMC," she said.



Meanwhile, Spencer, 55, said he felt his church's situation was different from that of some of his colleagues' churches where people haven't been struggling against the denomination's same-sex marriage/gay ordination ban for a lengthy time period.

"I think that's a key difference," he said. "You know, Epworth was the first Reconciling church in Oklahoma, and I think that the people in the pews were just ready for a change."