

LIFESTYLE

'Today is bittersweet': Final group of churches get formal OK for United Methodist exit

More churches get OK for formal United Methodist exit in final disaffiliation meeting



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One of Oklahoma's largest faith groups severed ties with more than 40 churches on Friday in Oklahoma City.

Delegates of the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference ratified the disaffiliation requests of 43 churches at a conference gathering at Oklahoma City Community College.

Only one church, Tishomingo United Methodist, had its exit hopes dashed when delegates voted against its disaffiliation. Several people said the house of worship did not do enough to alert all its professing members about a required congregational disaffiliation vote and this amounted to serious voting irregularity.

The disaffiliation gathering was the last of three planned special disaffiliation meetings called by the regional United Methodist affiliate led by Bishop Jimmy Nunn. Friday, the bishop said several times there would be no more disaffiliation meetings, which means that any churches still hoping to have their exit requests ratified are out of luck.

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. With the disaffiliation of a final 43 churches, 322 churches remained in the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference, leaders with the conference said on Friday.

More: What we know: Oklahoma churches seeking to cut ties with United Methodist denomination

Disaffiliation 'bittersweet', OKC metro-area churches say



Two Oklahoma City metro area churches, Mosaic United Methodist and First United Methodist Church of Mustang were among the final group of churches bowing out on Friday.

"Today is bittersweet," said the Rev. Aaron Tiger, senior minister of the Mustang church, 211 W State Highway 152.

He said the church, founded in 1902, has a long history with Methodism. Tiger said it will be renamed Crossroads Mustang.

"Our church has a 121-year history with the Methodist denomination and on Sunday in worship, we will give thanks for the many benefits and blessings that the United Methodist Church has provided us over the years," he said. "We want the best for our brothers and sisters who are remaining United Methodist."

Nunn said the 43 churches' disaffiliation would be effective on Nov. 1. This will give conference staff time to make sure the churches have paid the required apportionments that are owed, among other requirements.

More: Disappointed, but not disheartened: OKC churches in disaffiliation dispute talk Supreme Court ruling

Why churches are leaving the United Methodist Church



This third round of exit-seeking churches is part of an ever-widening schism in the international United Methodist Church. 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.

Friday, Tiger with the disaffiliating church in Mustang, didn't wish to get into details about why his congregation headed to the exit doors.

"We are a more traditional theological congregation but we are more interested in looking forward to our future than looking backwards on our decision," he said.

The Rev. Scott Spencer, senior pastor of Mosaic, has been more vocal about his church's decision to disaffiliate. Mosaic is only the second of 84 congregations in Oklahoma that sought to exit the United Methodist Church because church members want to be more inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community.

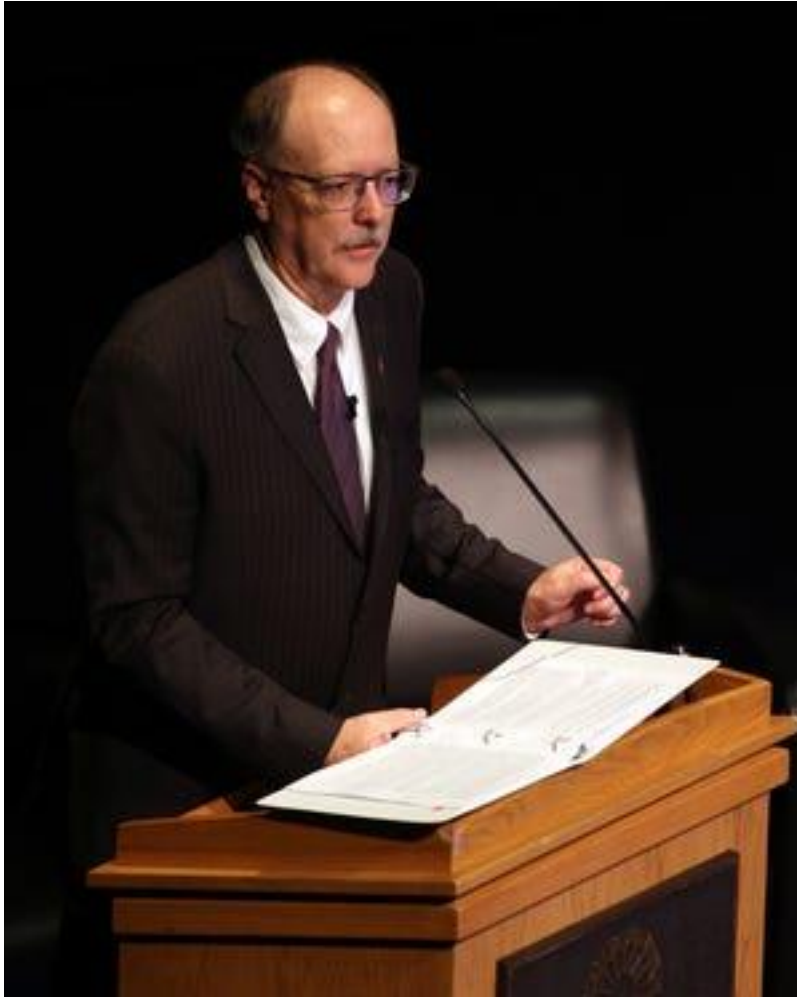
St. Luke's disaffiliated in April for similar reasons, but unlike St. Luke's, 222 NW 15, Mosaic members have publicly advocated for the LGBTQ+ community since the church evolved from the now defunct Epworth United Methodist.

Epworth and Mosaic had been 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.

"It's been a long journey. It's been a difficult journey," Spencer said Friday.

"Some of us are mourning the loss of the United Methodist connections, but we're excited about the future and what the future holds."

Pushing past disaffiliation



Nunn acknowledged negativity that surfaced as the disaffiliation trend gathered momentum in Oklahoma.

"Once we get through this process of disaffiliation, we must refocus on the mission of the Church and its rationale," he said. "If we retain and maintain a climate of distrust, distraction, rumors, accusations, suspicions against one another, we will never fulfill the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us."

Friday, the bishop shared a biblical metaphor that described the Church as having many rooms.

He said he hoped conference members would embrace the "challenging" metaphor.

"We've been tempted to lock the doors to some of the rooms that Jesus would have us to open and yet I remind us tonight that Jesus said, 'I am the door' and likewise said 'I hold the keys,'" Nunn said.

"We have either wanted to lock others out, or lock ourselves in. We've exchanged our heritage as people like the Good Samaritan, for the smallness of the Levite in Jesus' parable. Our mission will not be accomplished by locking doors, erecting walls or passing by on the other side of the road. United Methodists do not have to agree on everything — but we must take care to attend to the imperative of Paul found in Colossians 3:13, which says bear with one another — and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other."



What United Methodist churches in Oklahoma disaffiliated this week?

The 43 churches that ended their affiliation with the United Methodist Church on Friday 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
- Copan United Methodist
- 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
- First United Methodist Church of Mustang
- 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
- Tuttle United Methodist
- 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
- Wright City United Methodist