

Notable Comments

Florida Annual Conference Special Session

[Video](#)

47:50

Hi. This is Emily Edward Shughart, clergy in the East Central District. This is a speech for disaffiliation. On the one year anniversary of the mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub, we were preparing to host a gathering at the church with survivors and family members of the victims. That afternoon I received an e-mail from a fellow clergy colleague and leader within the WCA asking me to leave the United Methodist Church. Six and a half years later you all stand before this body of the United Methodist Church asking for yourselves to leave. To affirm this request makes public that the leadership and most, not all, of these 74 churches before us today have been at the forefront of the concerted effort to strategize, recruit, and campaign other United Methodist churches and clergy to disaffiliate from the connection. Forty-three of the churches we are voting on were plaintiffs to the lawsuit filed against the conference in the summer of 2022 which personally named the Bishop, the Assistant to the Bishop, the conference treasurer, the entire cabinet, and the lay volunteers who serve as officers of the conference trustees. A vote to approve disaffiliation is the culmination of their efforts to undermine and hinder the ability of other United Methodist clergy and laity to effectively carry out their ministry in many ways, such as threatening conference staff (including district superintendents and even their spouses), ongoing lawsuits, publicly humiliating fellow members from the floor of the annual conference and clergy sessions, holding closed door meetings with armed police on United Methodist property, incorporating new denominations using United Methodist resources, and ostracizing members of the LGBTQ community. A vote to approve is the next step that we can take to stop the harm caused to LGBTQ persons, both lay and clergy. A vote to approve disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 publicly records that matters of conscience surrounding human sexuality and the practice of homosexuality is the sole reason these churches seek to leave as is required by this provision. If you are a lay person and you're realizing that that you have been lied to, that this is not about the bodily resurrection of Christ or the Apostles Creed or owning your own building, I really am sorry. And the UMC will be here to welcome you back should you choose. To those seeking to leave, a vote for approval provides you the opportunity to use whatever integrity remains in you to cease and desist the lawsuits, proselytizing, and recruiting and stop the harm that you are doing. Ultimately, voting for disaffiliation is a vote of no confidence in these 74 churches to carry out the mission of the United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Let's approve what is before us and be done. Thank you.

Bishop: Reverend Shughart we're grateful to you...

At about 1:01, after the affirmative vote, Bishop Berlin made the following comment directed to a few persons within the larger disaffiliating group:

“Sadly a small portion of those leaving (and compared to the total it's a very small portion, but a very small portion of those leaving) over the past two years have not left in peace. We must simply acknowledge today that these persons insulted those who are pleased to remain United

Methodist. This small portion has judged us in the worst of ways. Some in a small portion have spread even lies and gossip about our church. These persons have sown the seeds of division and sadly they've chosen to violate the unity of the body of Christ which our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for in John 17. These persons have attacked us personally and they have attacked us as a community. And you in this very small portion (and, again, I'm not speaking to everyone who's leaving today... I'm just speaking to a sliver of these persons... you know who you are), the Holy Spirit will bring the wrong that you have done to your mind at a time that is fitting to the Lord so that you can repent of your actions. And as we separate from you, I want you to know that we leave all of that on you. We do not carry your harm with us. We do not carry your lies or your insults or anything that you've said about us. We leave you to the Lord's care in all of these matters and we trust you to God and I hope that the Lord will help you in your sanctification in the ways that are appropriate.

Now to those of us who remain United Methodists, I want to offer two observations: The time of disaffiliation has now come to a close. Amen and thanks be to God. Tomorrow... tomorrow morning as the sun comes up we begin the season of Advent, the advent of the Lord is before us. So let us let us embrace this season of joy the season of wonder a season in which we consider how to share the good news Jesus Christ with those who currently do not know God's love in God's grace. And friends, the work before us is not to beg people to stay United Methodist. It is to go forth and share Christ so that people may become Christians who are United Methodist. That's what we are now about. Let us set aside the sorrow of this year. Let us embrace the kindness and compassion and the love of this season. This is a time of new beginnings and so let us lay aside the yoke, because it has been a heavy yoke of conflict and discord, and let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let us love our neighbor as ourself and let us offer, even ourselves, tenderness and mercy that we also may know the joy of the Lord. We have so much abundance in our conference so much abundance in our extension ministry. So many people that get up every morning and go to work to bless college students and to bless people that are indigent and people that have needs and people that are vulnerable. We have local churches where people walk in and they are joyful to see one another and we can hear and we can see the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. So friends may you have eyes to see and may you have ears to hear. Let us take up the goodness that comes in the unity of the body of Christ just as scripture tells us to. Our conference is different now. We acknowledge that. There is a... I mean, friends, I felt so sad as Reverend Hother read that list of churches... I just felt sad... I want to acknowledge that... and yet you know. What if I could list the names of all the clergy that stay? All the laity that remain? All the churches are in the Florida conference? I could not help but celebrate and be glad because these are people who are committed to Christ as United Methodists. First John Three says this: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are." (I don't care what anybody says about us that is what we are... that's our identity .) Dear friends we are now children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known to us but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is and all who have hope in him purify themselves just as Christ is pure." Friends, I wish you a joyful advent and a very Merry Christmas. Last night I was in a grocery store. It's kind of late and there weren't many people there and there was this young woman and her job was to oversee that

area where you do the self checkout... and she was standing there by herself. When I walked up and she didn't have much to do... but she was standing where she should be standing. She's doing her job diligently, but no one was there and you know she was doing? She's singing a Christmas Carol... and she was singing it just loud enough that I heard the words of that Christmas Carol ...and it resonated in my own heart. And you know what? Because she was joyful, I was joyful and I checked out my few items and I walked up to her as I left and said "Hey, can I just tell you something? Thank you for the song that's on your heart and you really have made my day." I said, "I'm... this is the last thing I'm doing today and you've made it a joy. Thank you for being you ." And she was she was really happy about that. She was younger and she received that as a compliment and smiled and laughed and I told her how good she sounded and then she said, "Merry Christmas." Merry Christmas to you. Hey friends, be the person that sings the song. Be the person that brings the joy and invite somebody experience this season. We've completed the business of this called session and now I want to move to a closing prayer:

Lord God bless us as we enter the season of advent be with us this is not an easy hour this is not an easy year and yet you walked with us throughout it we're different conference now we have less churches we have less clergy we acknowledge that we see that and yet Lord I feel that something exciting is upon the horizon something that is unexpected something that we don't know it it will probably not mean that tomorrow morning we'll wake up and have twice as many churches or twice as many nine months it's it's probably going to be something that you're going to do in your own time through us so Lord let us have hearts that are open to you we are nothing without you but Lord we set aside the yoke of division we set aside the yoke of harm and hardship and we refuse to respond in kind and we pray Lord that you would look over us and simply give us a desire to help other people know the love of Jesus Christ that they might know the transformation of their lives that they might enter into true discipleship and that we would continue to grow in our sanctification because we are humble before you we are not the people who have it all figured out Lord we are not the people that know everything and we are not the people that can stand alone we stand with you you are a Lord and our savior bless us that we might know the transformation of our lives and the transformation of the world in Jesus name Amen friends we are now adjourned and I thank you for for being here and I pray God's blessings upon you go go in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit may the Lord bless you