

NAPERVILLE SUN

United Methodist Church settles legal battle over property, assets with Naperville Korean Church



For more than a decade, Naperville Korean Church (NKC) — previously the Naperville Korean United Methodist Church — offered worship and prayer services from property at 2403 W. Diehl Road in Naperville. (Tess Kenny/Naperville Sun)



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A 15-month legal battle between a breakaway faction of the United Methodist Church in Naperville and the church's regional body for Northern Illinois has been settled.

In May 2023, a property dispute arose between Naperville Korean Church (NKC) and the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church after NKC tried to break off from the conference following a disagreement over LGBTQ-related policies.

In breaking away, NKC members decided to take with them what they maintained were their rightful belongings, including church buildings. The conference subsequently filed suit.

In August, the conference and NKC signed a settlement agreement resolving the litigation, according to a news release. The case was officially closed and dismissed permanently in DuPage County Circuit Court "pursuant to the terms of the settlement agreement between the parties," court documents say.



The settlement comes nearly seven months after a [DuPage judge in March granted a preliminary injunction](#) restoring possession of disputed property and assets to the conference. Disputed assets included church property at 2403 W. Diehl Road, a parsonage at 2690 Bonita Court in Lisle and NKC's bank accounts.

With litigation resolved, the conference "still remains in control of the property and the accounts, per the preliminary injunction order, and then remaining issues were settled amicably between the parties," according to conference attorney Kasun Wijegunawardana.



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Asked what standing issues the settlement addressed, Wijegunawardana said, "Unfortunately, the details of the remaining disputes are confidential based on the terms of the agreement."

He did say that "they were just minor disputes" as the preliminary injunction "essentially addressed the major issues in the case."

Wijegunawardana also declined to answer when asked if the agreement included any financial payments.

Angela Im, an attorney who part of the defense counsel, was reached by phone but declined to comment. Instead, she thanked her co-counsel, the National Center for Life and Liberty, for its help on the case.

The Florida-based nonprofit legal ministry was brought on as lead defense counsel in April, according to Im and court documents. The center's mission is to protect and defend "church liberties, parental liberties, individual liberties and issues of life," its website says.

The center did not return a request for comment.

While litigation was resolved in the wake of March's preliminary injunction, a new congregation took shape at NKC's former West Diehl church property called Woori United Methodist Church, according to Wijegunawardana.

"It's a great result for the Korean congregants of the United Methodist Church," Wijegunawardana said. "They still have a place in Naperville that they can call home, that they can still worship in. I think that's what the (Northern Illinois Conference) bishop was concerned with ... from the beginning.

"I think that the court, as well as the cooperation between the two parties, was integral in coming to the solution that still keeps a home for the Korean population of Naperville."

Conference Bishop Dan Schwerin said in a statement, "I am grateful for the good people who remain faithful to the UMC and now worship at the site under the new name Woori United Methodist Church."

NKC's departure from the United Methodist Church is a microcosm of a larger schism within the denomination that erupted in recent years. Between 2019 and 2023, about one quarter of United Methodist U.S. congregations, like NKC, split away.

They were mostly conservative churches dismayed that the denomination wasn't enforcing bans it has long held against same-sex marriage and the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" — bans that are also now seeing a reversal.

Earlier this spring, the denomination repealed its ban on the celebrations of same-sex marriages or unions by its clergy and in its churches. It also repealed the church's longstanding ban on LGBTQ clergy.

The Associated Press contributed.

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