

# Disaffiliation FAQ

## What does disaffiliation mean?

By disaffiliation, we mean that we are leaving the United Methodist Church and the associated leadership, organization, and financial responsibilities that come with affiliation.

## Why is this happening in the United Methodist Church?

The United Methodist Church is in great turmoil and has been heading towards a split for some time. The troubles are complex and multilayered. But, at the heart of this turbulence is a decades-long struggle over what faithful Christian living looks like around human sexuality. During this time our pastors have attempted to shield La Croix from the rancor and divisiveness of this debate, while at the same time seeking to live faithfully to the gospel in a rapidly changing culture. Unfortunately, the denominational debate is making its way to local churches like La Croix.

Complicating matters further, those who wish to change our denomination's positions have taken to outright defiance of the United Methodist Church's rules around ordination and same-sex weddings. This has led to the widespread undermining of our covenant and life together as a denomination.

Our pastors have prepared a longer, more detailed document giving the history and background of this debate. Copies are being made available at the home meetings and can be obtained by request from the church office.

## Why is La Croix pursuing disaffiliation?

The changing complexion of the UMC is going to make it increasingly difficult for La Croix Church to operate as we have throughout our 34-year history. Ironically, we believe the best way for La Croix to remain the same is to leave. That's the short answer. The long answer is complex, and the meetings being held over the next few weeks will seek to give a broader picture of the situation.

## Why are we considering disaffiliation now?

The 2019 General Conference (the UMC's highest legislative body), in response to decades of debate and acrimony around issues surrounding human sexuality, laid out a process for churches seeking to disaffiliate from the UMC. This process, spelled out in Paragraph 2553 of our United Methodist Book of Discipline, sunsets at the end of 2023, with no other paths for separation promised. Several thousand UM churches across the country – with beliefs similar to our own – have already disaffiliated or are moving now to disaffiliate. With their voices gone from the debate within the denomination, we cannot assume circumstances will improve in the future. Regrettably, disaffiliation has become the best path forward.

Our Lead Team, made up of staff and non-staff who give leadership to La Croix's day-to-day work, went through a discernment process last fall which involved prayer, fasting, study, and deliberating on what God was leading us to do. Some began the process in favor of, others against, disaffiliation. In the end, we all felt strongly that God was leading us towards disaffiliation. This whole process was yielded to the Lord and bathed in prayer and trust. The Lord showed himself faithful throughout!

## How will La Croix change?

It is our hope that, in leaving the UMC, La Croix Church remains the same, and we will continue carrying out our mission of “leading people to wholeheartedly follow Jesus” living out our three core values:

- We are outwardly focused.
- We thrive in community.
- We never stop moving towards Jesus.

## What is the process for leaving?

We will follow the set of guidelines set by the conference, including multiple conversations with the congregation. This process culminates with a vote open to all members of La Croix Church with a two-thirds majority required to disaffiliate.

## If we leave the UMC, what’s next?

Because General Conference has not provided an orderly way for the denomination to divide, most churches are choosing to disaffiliate now leaving decisions about affiliation with another denomination for later. We want to be meaningfully connected to other like-minded churches. For now, we are recommending that La Croix Church joins a network of like-minded churches that would be in alignment with the theology of John Wesley, founder of Methodism. This yet-to-be-named group would be a relational network of local churches and their leaders who are passionately committed to making more and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ and living in accountability to one another.

This network is rising out of a group called *The Sanctification Project*, a group of pastors around the country that Pastor Ron has been involved with for over three years. The members of this group are all leaders of dynamic United Methodist churches, churches brimming with passion for Jesus, desiring to reach new people, and impacting the communities around them and the world.

## Can someone become a member before the vote?

Unfortunately, no. All persons interested in becoming a member of La Croix Church must go through our 10-week Rooted course. There will not be another completed round of Rooted before the members-only vote.

## Does this require legal action?

Not at all. There is no legal action being taken by La Croix or the Missouri Conference and no animosity exists between us. Pastor Ron is friends with these leaders and the conference has been gracious in its response to La Croix. This is being handled amicably among Christian brothers and sisters.

## What are the financial implications?

According to the terms of Paragraph 2553 in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* and those set by the Missouri Conference, we owe two year’s apportionments (the dues every congregation pays for the ministries and administrative needs of the denomination) and the unfunded liability on the UM pension plan (a plan the denomination has for retired clergy). That amounts to \$1,600,000 but \$600,000 of that has been or will be paid by July 1, 2023. (The conference graciously counted our 2022 apportionment dollars towards the fee.) Keep in mind that La Croix pays a little over \$410,000 each year in apportionments which means the amount owed is less than three years’ apportionments. After that,

funds previously dedicated to apportionments can be redirected towards ministries within and outside the walls of our church.

The good news under this provision is that we get to keep our buildings. In the United Methodist Church buildings are owned by the denomination in what is known as the “trust clause.” Under this special provision, Paragraph 2553, churches may leave with their buildings. This provision expires at the end of 2023 and is the reason so many churches are disaffiliating now.

## How are our leaders being held accountable for the well-being of La Croix Church?

It is the goal of leadership at La Croix Church to retain the same level of oversight & accountability that we currently have. To that end, we will continue to operate with the same legislative structure we have had as a United Methodist church. The Church Council, elected by members, serves as our chief governing body with other committees that report to it including the Finance Committee, Pastor/Parish Relations Committee, Trustees, and Missions Council among others. Our aim as before is to operate with real oversight, integrity and the highest ethical standards.

## News reports about the UMC focus on LGBTQ matters. Where does La Croix stand?

The media can be counted on to highlight the controversial and the most polarizing aspects of the debate within Methodism. While the debate within the UMC has focused on issues of human sexuality, the rift goes much deeper. It has to do with our understanding of Scripture and its authority in our lives. These differing opinions have led to differing positions on matters related to human sexuality.

Over the years, we have attempted to be straightforward about our *positions* while maintaining a *posture* that is grace-filled. We have not been an issue driven church, nor do we intend to become one. We want our posture to be grace-filled, loving, and welcoming of all persons, no matter where they come from or what they’ve done. This is the gospel. We also desire our positions to be grounded in scripture and the truth of God’s word. Otherwise, we are simply being driven by cultural trends. We believe the scriptures clearly and consistently teach that sex is reserved for marriage and that marriage was designed by God for one man and one woman for life. We invite all into a life of discipleship where we are transformed into the image of Christ. Growing in grace involves submitting all our life, from our money to our time, and yes, even our sexual behavior, to the Lordship of Jesus.

## What if I hold views different from our leadership?

La Croix has long welcomed people with differing opinions within our church community and we’ll continue to welcome people with views that differ from our pastoral staff and leadership teams.

## What can I, as a member of La Croix, be doing?

We would ask that you pray and that get informed about disaffiliation. Please pray a) For the unity of our church, b) for the people of our church, especially newer believers, that this is not unsettling to their faith and c) that this is not a distraction from us making more and maturing disciples of Jesus.

The vote on disaffiliation is set for **Monday evening, March 20, at 7:00** in the worship center. Per the rules enforced by the Missouri Conference, only full members are allowed to be present and to vote.

## What is our future?

While these are challenging days for the United Methodist Church and our congregation, we believe God has his hand on La Croix Church now like he has for the past 34 years! Necessary endings often bring new beginnings. We believe new and vibrant expressions of Methodism will spring up and result in many more people coming to know God's love in Jesus Christ. That is something to celebrate! The best is yet to come!