



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 28, 2019

Texas Megachurch Leaves UMC Over Looming LGBTQ Issue

Another major congregation within the United Methodist Church (UMC) has opted to leave the mainline Christian denomination over ongoing efforts to change UMC policy to allow for the ordination of openly homosexual clergy and the blessing of same-sex partnerships as “marriage.”

On December 15 the 2,800-member Grace Fellowship UMC of Katy, Texas, a suburb of Houston, voted by a 96 percent margin to exit the denomination, citing the UMC’s decades-long debate over whether to remove language from its Book of Discipline manual declaring that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.”



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In an interview with the ChristianPost.com, Grace Fellowship’s pastor, Jim Leggett, observed that over the past year “it has become clear to us that despite having biblical standards of morality on paper in the denomination’s Book of Discipline, the leadership of the United Methodist Church is unable or unwilling to live by those standards.”

Leggett told the Christian news website that his parishioners decided it was time “to remove ourselves from the dysfunctional fighting going on in the United Methodist Church so that we can fully devote our energies to fulfilling the mission and vision that God has given to us.”

He added that “at one point, we looked up and noticed that we were spending easily 30 percent of our leadership meeting time discussing the issues of the UMC, and we realized that this was not good stewardship of our time and resources for the Kingdom of God.”

The congregation has said that it intends to join with the Free Methodist Church (FMC), a small, biblically based denomination, founded in 1860, to which an increasing number of former UMC congregations have turned in recent years in search of leadership and connection.

In a prepared statement, the FMC’s leadership explained that the denomination is “not merely a more conservative version” of the liberalized UMC. “We have a distinct culture with deeply held values that have been shaped over our 160-year history.” The statement added that as congregations exit from the UMC and are in search of a compatible replacement organization, “we want to ensure that those who consider joining us are truly in agreement not only with our doctrine, but also our values and culture.”

The ChristianPost reported that the FMC’s affiliation process, “while flexible, generally takes between one to three years and includes a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between the two parties. ‘Now that Grace has officially voted to leave the UMC, we anticipate having an affiliation MOU in place by the beginning of January,’ explained the FMC Board.”



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In the UMC's own reporting on the split, the denomination's official news organ, [UM News](#), quoted the UMC's Texas Conference head, Bishop Scott Jones, as expressing his disappointment over Grace Fellowship's exit from the denomination. "I am sorry that they are taking this step, and I have made my case why they should remain United Methodist," Jones said. "They believe this really is the best way they can be faithful to Christ. So we have a disagreement in discernment, and yet I am providing a graceful exit for them, given the disagreement."

UM News quoted Leggett as explaining that "the reason for Grace Fellowship's vote to leave the UMC is our conviction that the Free Methodist Church better aligns with our beliefs, especially around the authority and truthfulness of Scripture."

The UMC news site also noted that the Free Methodist Church, with which Grace Fellowship is seeking to align, "emphasizes its commitment to following Scripture. While welcoming all to its churches, the Free Methodist Church holds that the Bible defines marriage as between a man and a woman."

UM News noted that earlier in 2019 a special UMC leadership conference "underscored longstanding internal divisions over how accepting to be of homosexuality." Delegates at the conference "approved by a 438-384 vote the Traditional Plan, which reinforced bans on same-sex marriage and ordination of 'self-avowed practicing homosexuals.'"

However, added the news site, "resistance to that vote has been strong among United Methodists in the U.S. and western Europe, and some legislation introduced for the 2020 General Conference calls for a breakup or major restructuring of the denomination."

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of Kansas City's Church of the Resurrection, the largest UMC congregation in the U.S., has speculated that within the next year the UMC could lose up to 7,500 congregations over the issue of homosexuality.

Hamilton, who reportedly favors changing language in the Book of Discipline to make the UMC more inclusive to LGBTQ worshipers and clergy, was quoted by the [ChristianPost.com](#) as saying that "a year from now, we will not be the same church that we are today."

The [ChristianPost](#) reported that according to Hamilton's predictions, "3,400 and 6,800 congregations will leave the UMC in protest to join a new theologically conservative denomination while another 300 to 1,000 churches will decide that the denomination is not inclusive enough. 'So we'll lose 3,400 to 6,800 on one side and maybe 300 to 1,000 churches on the other side,' explained Hamilton, who admitted that this was 'just a guess.'"

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