

**A Word from Woody . . .**  
***The Times They Are A-Changin***

In some ways, it feels like 1964 again. Not that I remember it—I was only one at the time! But that’s the year Bob Dylan’s classic song came out, “The Times They Are A-Changin”. It seems strangely relevant. Please observe the predictive power of the song’s closing words.

The line is drawn  
The curse it is cast  
The slow one now  
Will later be fast  
As the present now  
Will later be past  
The order is rapidly fadin’  
And the first one now  
Will later be last  
For the times they are a-changin

With a few changes here and there, these words describe our present time in The United Methodist Church and, in particular, Lake Vista UMC seeking to disaffiliate from the denomination. Let’s examine the past, present, and upcoming future.

How did we get here? In 2016 something happened that never happened before in The UMC. A practicing homosexual married to someone of the same sex was consecrated as a bishop in The UMC. This was not only an open dismissal of what is convincingly the clear teaching of the Bible, but also a rejection of The Book of Discipline which UM ministers are ordained to uphold. Indeed, this new bishop should never have been ordained a minister. The accountability structures in The UMC were powerless to overturn this bishop’s consecration, and she is still a bishop today. As a result, the conservatives in The UMC formed the Wesleyan Covenant Association to advocate for bringing the denomination back to the clear teaching of Scripture and, if that did not work, to seek an amicable separation. In 2017 our congregation voted to become a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and we are now one of approximately 10 churches in the Louisiana Conference who are members. In early 2020 something very promising occurred. All the various advocacy groups agreed on a plan of separation called the Protocol, which allowed (among other things)

conservative churches to leave The UMC and form a new denomination with the blessing of \$25 million. Unfortunately, COVID cancelled General Conference from ever meeting to vote on the Protocol, and it is now widely considered as having a remote chance of passing at General Conference 2024. Why is this remote?

This brings us to the present situation. Last year about 130 churches in the U.S., mostly conservative, disaffiliated from The UMC. This year hundreds more are expected to depart. These departures have forced the Wesleyan Covenant Association to launch its new conservative denomination, the Global Methodist Church, this month on May 1<sup>st</sup>, so that the departing churches will have a place to land. Also, there is a troubling consequence to so many conservative churches leaving. There is now a very good chance that the centrists and leftists in The UMC will have a majority for the first time ever at General Conference when it meets in 2024. If that happens, then one can reasonably expect the delegates to jettison any consideration of the Protocol with its \$25 million gift to conservatives. They will instead vote to change The Book of Discipline to allow for same-sex weddings and the ordination of practicing homosexuals. This would leave the conservative churches stuck in a left-leaning denomination since the conferences within The UMC are widely reported to have title to the churches' property. There is, however, one last route for conservative churches to leave The UMC with their property-- a provision called Paragraph 2553 in The Book of Discipline, which will expire in 2023.

And this brings us to the up-and-coming future. The Church Council of Lake Vista UMC has voted to disaffiliate from The UMC according to the provisions of Paragraph 2553 and become an independent church (at least initially). This paragraph would require us to pay the Louisiana Conference \$78,299, which represents two and half years of apportionments and our unfunded pension liability. There are several things in the near future that must take place for us to disaffiliate. The first is for the members of Lake Vista UMC to vote to disaffiliate by a two-thirds margin at our Tuesday, May 31<sup>st</sup> Church Conference. Then we must pay the \$78,299—which will be a loan we must acquire and pay off after we disaffiliate. Once those two things happen we need Annual Conference, which meets June 14-17 in Baton Rouge, to vote with a simple majority to allow us to disaffiliate. Thereafter, the Louisiana Conference will transfer the property title to us, and we will be sure to finish such things as our

**new name, becoming incorporated, obtaining a 501c3 status with the IRS, and getting a new tax ID number. Ah, yes, and your pastor will have to find ordination elsewhere.**

**Some may wonder—isn't this rushed? Why are we not waiting to disaffiliate at Annual Conference in 2023? One key reason. At this year's Annual Conference the Conference Board of Trustees will bring a proposal for a vote, apparently with the support of our Bishop, to add one more fee to disaffiliating churches—a percentage value of the church property. I have heard this fee could be anywhere from 5-25%. If this proposal passes—and it has a good chance—then disaffiliation would be too costly for most churches, especially ours.**

**You may be wondering how you can help during these times that are a-changin. I'm glad you asked! First, please pray for Lake Vista UMC—its leaders and members—throughout this process for the Lord's wisdom, clear leading, and refreshing. May we be as Jesus instructed, "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16b). Second, if you are a full church member, please be there for the Church Conference vote on Tuesday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. And third, please be in prayer about our capital campaign as we seek to pay down the \$78,299 needed to disaffiliate.**

**Love in Jesus our Lord and Savior,**

**Woody**