

The background is a complex stained glass design. It features a large, semi-circular area on the right side filled with a dark blue, halftone pattern. This area contains a silhouette of a church with a prominent steeple. The rest of the image is composed of various geometric shapes in shades of teal, yellow, red, blue, and white, separated by black outlines, creating a mosaic effect.

Disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church in North Carolina:

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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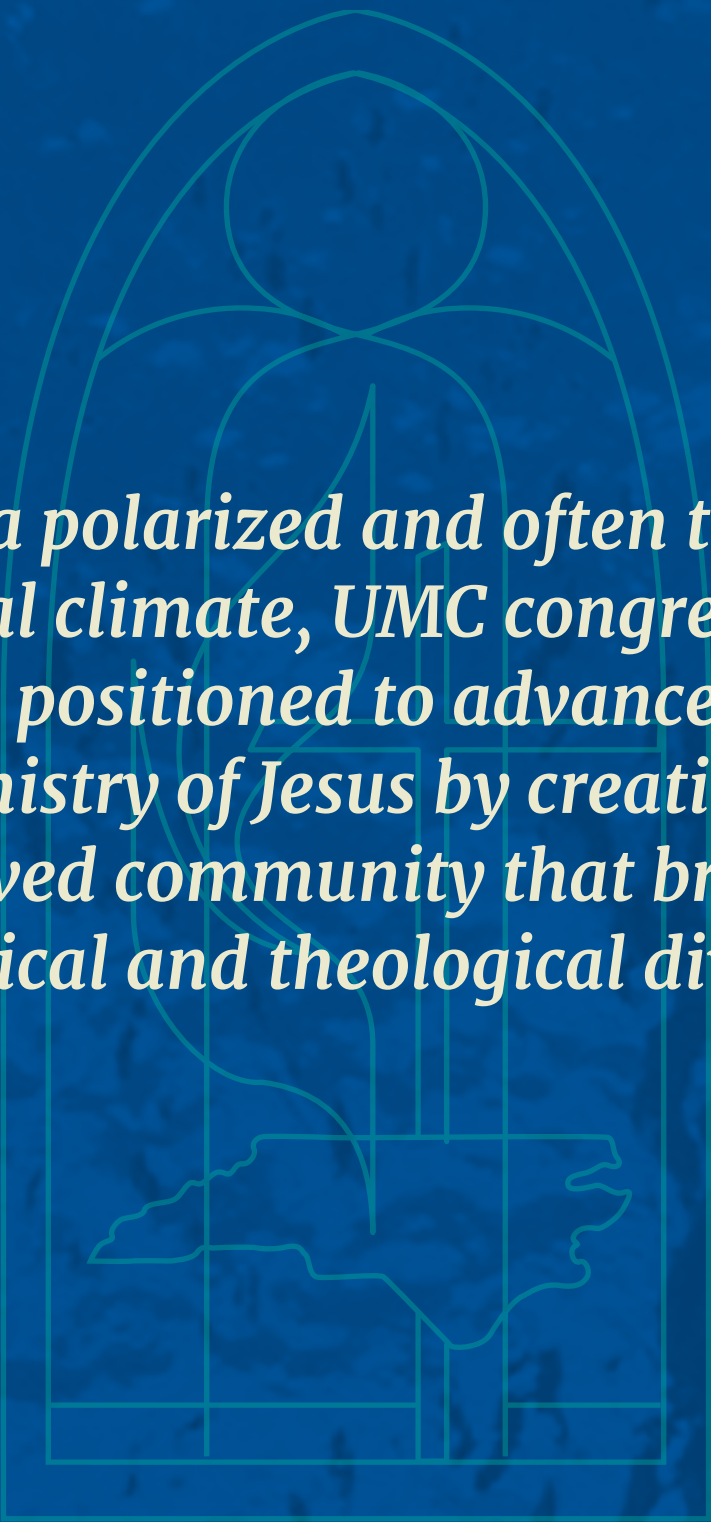
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In a polarized and often toxic political climate, UMC congregations are positioned to advance the ministry of Jesus by creating a beloved community that bridges political and theological divides.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Formed in 1968, the United Methodist Church is in the midst of a major upheaval. Across Annual Conferences, theologically and politically conservative clergy and congregations are choosing to leave the denomination to pursue ministry in a context more aligned with their beliefs. Longstanding disagreements about the ordination and marriage of people in same-sex relationships are driving these exits. An analysis of survey and administrative data from the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Annual Conferences (the principal administrative divisions in the UMC in the US) shows one-third of churches and one-sixth of all pastors have left, posing substantial spiritual, relational, and financial challenges for the Conferences. However, as this report documents, the outcome of the disaffiliation process presents some important opportunities.

This report assembles survey data from UMC clergy in North Carolina collected in 2021 with official administrative records from the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Annual Conferences that identify which clergy chose to leave the denomination. Our analysis of these data shows how disaffiliating clergy and congregations differ from remaining clergy and congregations and gives an early view of what the two North Carolina Conferences will look like following the schism. While patterns of disaffiliation likely vary across the US, our findings likely reflect realities across the country. Our key findings are:

- 1** | Disaffiliating clergy are much more politically and theologically conservative than remaining clergy.
- 2** | Remaining clergy are typically more politically liberal than their congregants and oversee more theologically divided congregations.
- 3** | While disaffiliating churches are slightly smaller and more rural overall, congregations of all sizes and locations are disaffiliating.
- 4** | Disaffiliating clergy almost exclusively identify as white, are mostly men, and are more likely to be licensed local pastors rather than elders.
- 5** | Compared to disaffiliating clergy, remaining clergy report more symptoms consistent with depression, anxiety, burnout, and occupational stress.

Moving forward, our findings paint a challenging picture. Financial strains are likely to be exacerbated with the departure of many congregations, potentially making it difficult for the denomination to effectively support a significant number of clergy who are struggling with depression, anxiety, and burnout. But we also find reason for hope. What was true of the UMC is even more true now: United Methodist churches remain some of the very few institutions in American society where people from different political persuasions can build deep and meaningful relationships with each other. In a polarized and often toxic political climate, UMC congregations are positioned to advance the ministry of Jesus by creating a beloved community that bridges political and theological divides.

THE SCHISM IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The United Methodist Church's ongoing schism is one of the most significant events in the denomination's history. Following the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference, the UMC installed a provision for congregations to disaffiliate in ¶ 2553 of the Book of Discipline. Per this provision, congregations could leave the denomination and retain their property so long as the process was completed prior to December 31, 2023 and they made a financial contribution to the denomination to cover their portion of outstanding pension liabilities. Many conservative congregations chose to use this provision to leave the denomination, whether joining the newly formed Global Methodist Church, another denomination, or continuing their ministry as a non-denominational church. While a few clergy were removed by the denomination over issues related to disaffiliation, most clergy exits were through voluntary withdraw from the denomination (the process is laid out in ¶ 360 of the Book of Discipline), often, but not always, along with their congregation. While some congregations may choose to disaffiliate in the coming months, the process is much more difficult, and we have likely witnessed the vast majority of congregational exits in North Carolina. On the other hand, clergy can still leave the denomination. This report aims to answer the question, "What do the two North Carolina Annual Conferences look like after disaffiliation?" and suggest ways the Conferences can move forward in service to the clergy, congregations, and communities they serve.

While punditry abounds about the shape of the UMC post-disaffiliation, this report relies upon empirical data to document the new contours of the two Annual Conferences in North Carolina. We use a combination of administrative records and the 2021 wave of the Duke Clergy Health Initiative's Statewide Longitudinal Survey of UMC Clergy in North Carolina (referred to as the CHI Survey). The administrative data identify which clergy and congregations are disaffiliating (while clergy do not

technically disaffiliate, we use this term to denote clergy who were removed or withdrew), and the CHI Survey data provide insight into various characteristics of the clergy and congregations who are leaving.

The CHI Survey is an extensive, high-quality survey that asks North Carolina Methodist clergy questions about their job, stress, mental and physical health, relationship with their congregation, and political and theological views. The clergyperson is also asked to assess the characteristics of their congregation. The CHI survey has been conducted by Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and her team at Duke University since 2008. In 2021, all UMC clergy in either the North Carolina Conference or Western North Carolina Conference were invited to participate in the survey, which received responses from 1,521 clergy for a response rate of 72% (which is very high by modern standards). While the CHI Survey includes clergy who did not serve a congregation or who have recently retired, this report focuses on the 949 clergy who were under appointment to serve at least one congregation in 2021. Clergy who remained in the UMC (n=621 church-appointed) were also surveyed in fall of 2023, allowing us to see if trends predicted by the 2021 data would be reflected in the denomination after disaffiliation.

Disaffiliating clergy and congregations were identified through the Business of Annual Conference reports published by each conference. This includes the regular Business of Annual Conference reports and conference reports from special sessions called specifically for processing disaffiliation requests.¹ The reports of their respective conferences listed the ordained clergy and licensed local pastors who chose to leave the denomination to join another denomination, continue ministry outside of a denomination, or leave ministerial work entirely. The names listed in both the WNCC and NCC conference reports were then cross-referenced with the CHI Survey data,

allowing comparison between disaffiliating clergy and non-disaffiliating clergy across all the questions the CHI Study asked. Similarly, congregations voting to leave the UMC were listed in their conferences' annual and special session reports. These names can be connected to existing national data on UMC congregations as well as linked to information provided by clergy who completed the CHI Survey. This allowed us to analyze trends at both the clergy and congregational levels.

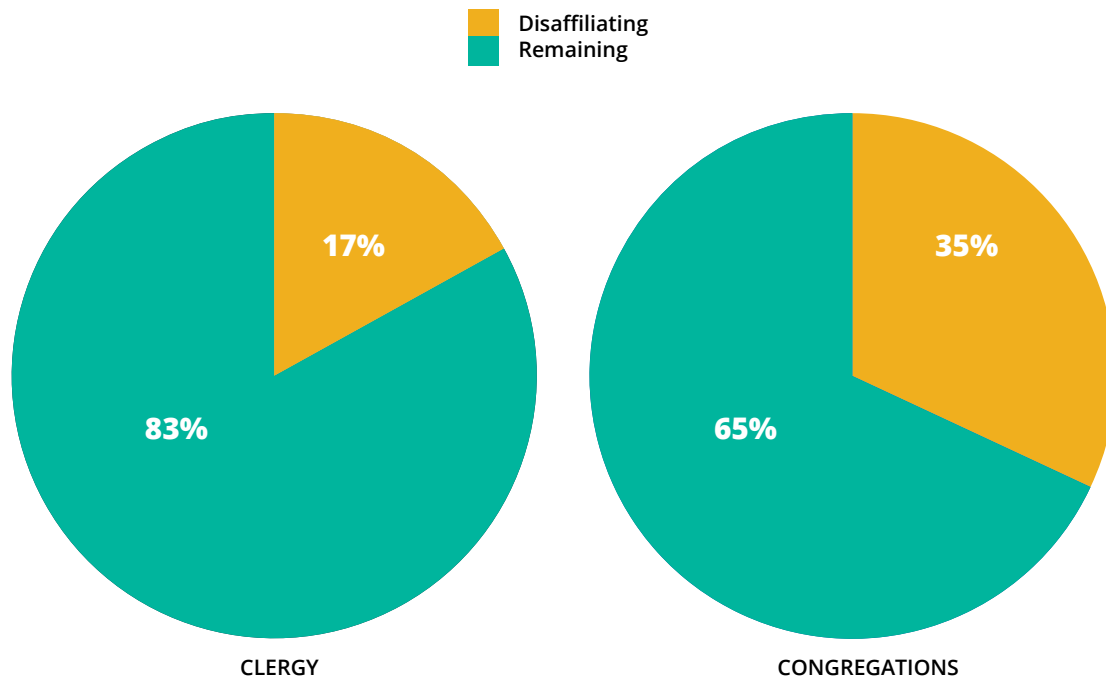
Who Has Left?

Figure 1 shows the percentage of congregations and clergy who have disaffiliated. As of February 8th, 2024, 17.5% (166) of active congregational clergy who completed the 2021 CHI survey have disaffiliated from the UMC.² There is a higher rate of disaffiliation among clergy from the North Carolina Conference (NCC) than the Western

North Carolina Conference (WNCC). About 22% of clergy affiliated with the NCC in 2021 left the denomination, while only 15% of WNCC clergy left. Among congregations, 671 UM churches in North Carolina have disaffiliated, representing 35% of UM churches in the state. This includes 325 congregations from the NCC (41%) and 346 congregations from the WNCC (32%).³

The fact that a higher percentage of congregations left than clergy means that some clergy chose to remain with the UMC while their congregation went a separate direction. This was true for 146 (15%) of the active congregational clergy who responded to the CHI Survey. The reverse (a clergy person disaffiliating while their primary congregation remains with the denomination) is substantially less common – only 4% of the clergy in the sample fall into this category.

Figure 1:
Percentages of Clergy and Congregations in North Carolina Leaving the UMC



1 The Western North Carolina Conference called special sessions on May 6th and November 4th, 2023, to process disaffiliation requests, while the North Carolina Conference did so on October 7th, 2023. Business of Annual Conference reports from 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 were consulted to find disaffiliating clergy.

2 Most UMC clergy in North Carolina responded to the CHI survey, but some did not. Those who did not fill out the 2021 survey were no more or less likely to disaffiliate than those who did. As of this writing, 18.1% of all active clergy serving congregations eligible to be contacted by the CHI 2021 survey have disaffiliated.

3 The Lewis Center's final report lists 41% of churches in the NCC (n=325) leaving and 33% (n=346) in the WNCC leaving. <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/twenty-five-percent-of-churches-disaffiliated-from-the-united-methodist-church/>

THEOLOGY AND POLITICS



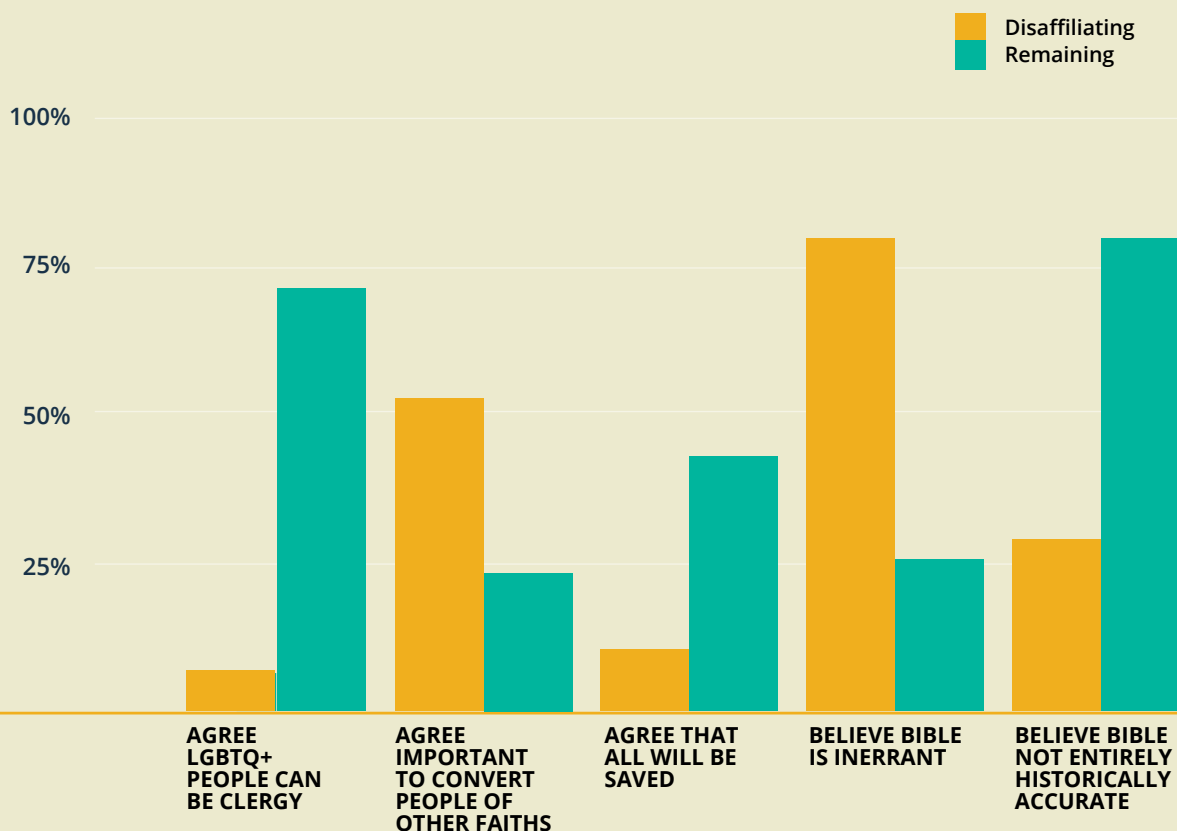
*Disaffiliating Clergy are More Conservative
Than Remaining Clergy*

At the center of the schism are disagreements about gender and Christian marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy. Unsurprisingly, disaffiliating clergy have different theological beliefs on these and other issues from clergy remaining with the denomination. The major theological differences between disaffiliating and remaining clergy are shown in Figure 2. In general, disaffiliating clergy have more conservative theological beliefs,⁴ including a greater emphasis on proselytization and a less universal view of salvation. Nearly half (52%) of disaffiliating clergy at least slightly agree with the statement “It is important for me to try to persuade people in other religions to accept my religion instead of their own.” In contrast, only about a quarter (23%) of clergy remaining with the denomination at least slightly agreed with that statement. Looking at survey data from fall of 2023 of church appointed clergy remaining in the UMC, 17% agreed with this statement. There are similar differences in beliefs about salvation. While a significant minority, 39%,

of clergy remaining with the UMC agreed with the statement that “all people will eventually be saved,” only 9% of disaffiliating clergy did. In fall 2023, 36% of clergy agreed with this statement.

These theological differences extend to different views of the Bible, too, with disaffiliating clergy holding a more “inerrantist” view of scripture (i.e., that the Bible is without error or fault in its teaching) than clergy remaining with the UMC. The CHI Survey gets at clergy’s beliefs about the Bible by presenting five statements and asking clergy to select the statement closest to their own views. While there were five options presented, almost all UMC clergy selected one of two statements: (1) “The Bible is the inspired word of God, without errors. Some parts are meant to be symbolic, but all of it applies today,” or (2) “The Bible is the inspired word of God that still speaks to us today, but not all of it is historically accurate and/or some parts reflect the culture in which it was written and do not apply today.” The option a clergy person

Figure 2:
Theological Views of North Carolina UMC Clergy by Disaffiliation Status, 2021



⁴ While we acknowledge that not all theological beliefs fit on a conservative-liberal scale, for the purpose of this report, we think it is helpful to think along these lines. Another way to put this is contrasting beliefs that align more closely with typical Evangelical Christian rather than Mainline Protestant positions.



selected is strongly related to whether or not they chose to disaffiliate from the denomination. Most (73%) clergy remaining with the UMC chose the latter option, stating that they believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, but they do not think it is completely inerrant, and only 23% chose the former option (in 2023, these percentages were 77% and 21%). The views of clergy disaffiliating from the UMC are reversed. A large majority (72%) endorsed a more inerrantist view of scripture, and only 25% agreed that some parts of the Bible were not historically accurate. Disaffiliating clergy are more theologically conservative than remaining clergy. However, it is worth noting that very few (2%) selected the most conservative statement that “the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word-for-word.”

Unsurprisingly, these theological differences extend to feelings about whether congregations should allow lesbian and gay people to hold religious leadership positions. However, the division is not quite as clean as one might expect. A large majority (85%) of clergy leaving the denomination at least slightly disagree with the notion that “all religious leadership positions should be open to people in same-sex relationships,” and only 6% agree. However, not all clergy with conservative views on this issue are disaffiliating. Just under a quarter (24%) of UMC clergy *remaining* in the denomination disagree with allowing gay and lesbian people to hold religious leadership positions, and 65% agree. This is contrasted with numbers from 2021, where 58% of clergy favored LGBTQ+ ordination and 35% did not. Perhaps some of these clergy who are against LGBTQ+ inclusion intend to withdraw but have not yet done so. Looking at survey data from church-appointed clergy remaining in the denomination in 2023, 25% at least slightly disagreed, and 75% at least slightly agreed. This provides strong evidence that a non-trivial minority of UMC clergy remain in the denomination who are against ordaining LGBTQ+ clergy. How long this group will stay in the denomination is yet to be seen, but at least some amount of ambivalence on LGBTQ+ issues among UMC clergy is likely to persist for years to come.

The differences between disaffiliating and remaining clergy also extend to differences in political affinity. Clergy in the CHI Survey were asked which political party they identify with (Democrat, Republican, Independent, or other).

Not all clergy with conservative views are disaffiliating. Just under a quarter (24%) of UMC clergy remaining in the denomination disagree with allowing gay and lesbian people to hold religious leadership positions.

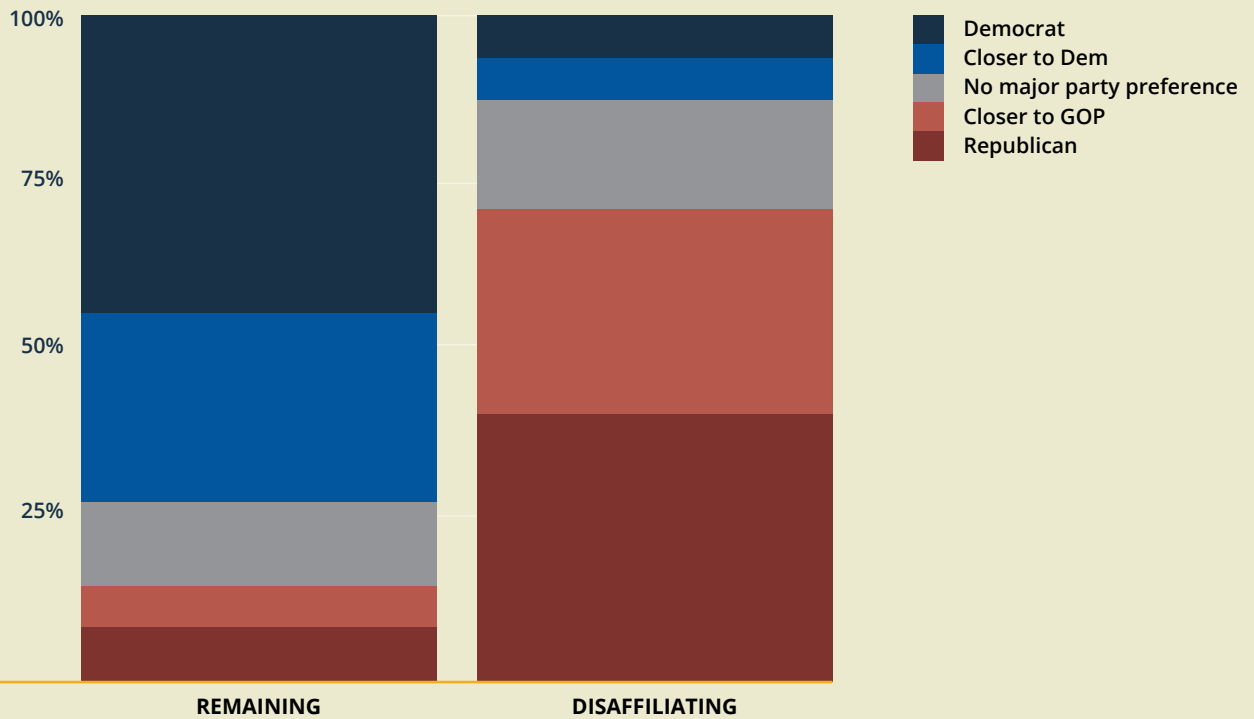
While a majority of clergy (51%) identified with one of the two major parties, a substantial minority said they were either independent (41%), identified with some other party (5%), or were “not sure” of which party they identify with (2%). Political science research has shown that people who report they are Independent often have strong partisan voting preferences and policy positions. To tease out a partisan lean from the pastors who said they were Independents, we used two nearly identically worded questions asking respondents how often they agreed with the positions of the Democratic or Republican parties: “almost never,” “less than half of the time,” “about half of the time,” “more than half of the time,” or “almost always.” Those who did not claim a major party label but reported agreeing with the Democratic Party more often than the Republican Party were coded as “Independent, leaning Democrat,” and vice-versa for those who reported agreeing more often with the Republican Party. Those who reported no major party attachment and also reported agreeing with each party just as often were coded as “Independent, no two-party preference.”

After the split, 73% of clergy remaining expressed affinity for the Democratic Party and 12% for the Republican Party.

As shown in Figure 3, only 8% of North Carolina clergy remaining with the UMC identify as Republicans, with a further 4% saying they are Independents but closer to the Republican Party. Most of the clergy staying with the denomination either identify as Democrats (45%) or are independents or affiliated with another party but lean Democrat (29%). About 13% report equivalent views of the two major parties. The 2023 CHI survey shows a similar proportion of Republicans and Republican leaners in the population (14%). The political affinities of disaffiliating clergy are

almost perfectly mirrored. Very few (6%) say they think of themselves as Democrats or lean Democrat in their policy views (6%). The remainder are Republican (40%), lean Republican (31%) or report no two-party preference (16%). To put this another way, prior to the split, 64% of UMC clergy in North Carolina identified as Democrats or leaned Democrat and 24% were Republican or leaned Republican. After the split, 73% of clergy expressed affinity for the Democratic Party and 12% for the Republican Party.

Figure 3:
Political Makeup of Clergy by Disaffiliation Status



KEY POINTS

Disaffiliating clergy have more conservative theological beliefs than remaining clergy, however, a quarter of clergy remaining in the UMC are opposed to the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy.

The political makeup of clergy has changed significantly. Only 15% of clergy are Republicans or lean Republican.

CONGREGATIONAL FRACTURES



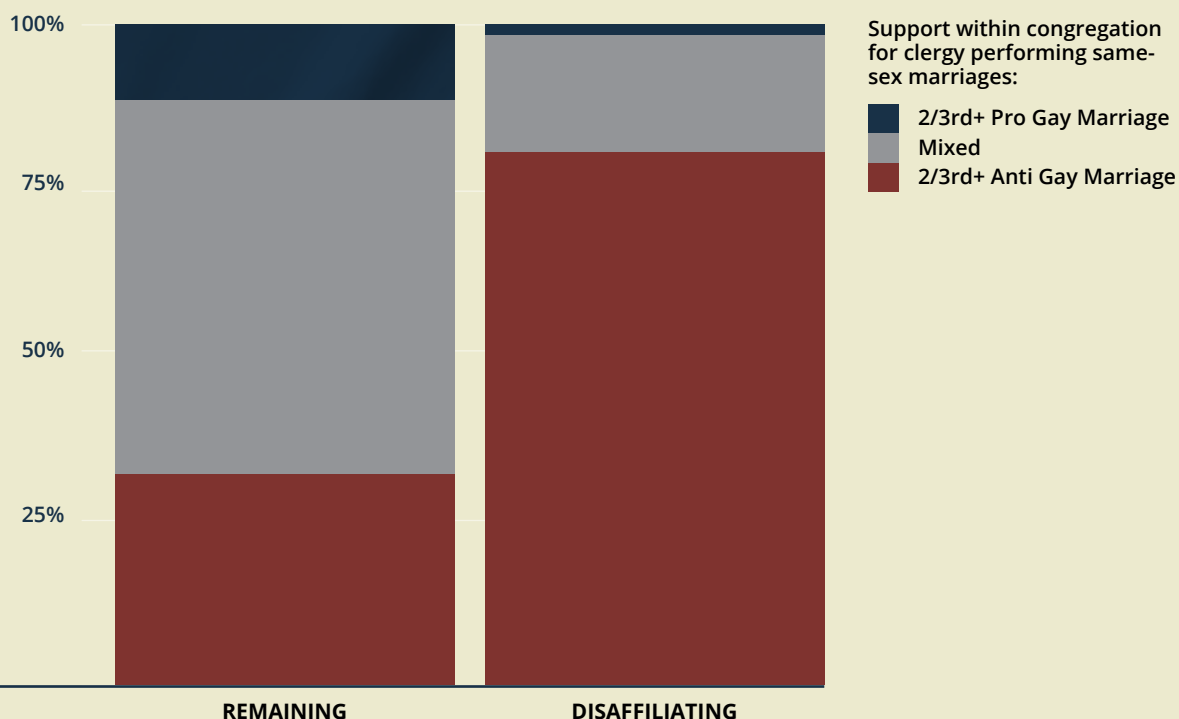
*Remaining Congregations are More Divided
Than Disaffiliating Congregations*

While clergy are important in guiding the views of their congregants, often their political and theological opinions do not align with those of their congregation. This dynamic is likely exacerbated in the UMC which uses an appointment system to assign clergy to congregations. Clergy may find themselves pastoring a congregation divided by politics or theology, or even a congregation largely unified around beliefs with which the pastor disagrees. This is another area where disaffiliating congregations differ from those remaining with the denomination, as the clergy of disaffiliating congregations report that their congregations tend to be more unified on LGBTQ+ issues and politics as well as experience less conflict around issues of human sexuality. Moreover, disaffiliating clergy tend to be much more politically aligned with their congregants than clergy remaining with the denomination.

Disaffiliating congregations are fairly uniform in their opposition to same-sex marriage. On average, clergy of disaffiliating congregations report that about 83% of their congregants are “strongly opposed” to UMC clergy performing

same-sex marriages, and only 9% “strongly support” gay marriage. In contrast, clergy serving remaining congregations report an average of 51% of congregants who strongly oppose same-sex marriage and 32% who strongly support it. Put another way, we can categorize congregations based on their reported levels of support for same-sex marriage into three groups: predominantly pro-same-sex marriage congregations where more than two-thirds strongly support the practice, predominantly anti-same-sex marriage congregations where more than two-thirds are opposed, and divided congregations that fall somewhere in between. As Figure 4 shows, a majority (56%) of congregations remaining with the UMC fall into the last group, 32% are predominantly opposed to same-sex marriage, and 11% are predominantly in favor. In contrast, 81% of congregations leaving the denomination are predominantly against same-sex marriage, and only 19% are mixed. It might be expected that more conservative members of remaining UMC churches have left, meaning UMC churches are more progressive. There is some evidence supporting this hypothesis. Using data from the

Figure 4:
Percentage of Congregations That Support, Oppose, or Hold Mixed Views on Clergy Performing Same-sex Marriage by Congregational Disaffiliation Status, 2021



2023 survey, we found that 51% of the remaining congregations were mixed on this issue, 17% were in favor, and 31% opposed. So, the proportion of pro-LGBTQ+ congregations have increased, but the proportion of congregations mostly opposed has not changed. Once again, these results underscore the fact that UMC congregations remain places with considerable diversity on questions of sexuality.

Consequently, disaffiliating congregations tend to have less conflict around LGBTQ+ issues, as the laity are mostly in agreement that gay and lesbian people should not have equal access to religious leadership positions or the sacrament of marriage. However, many remaining congregations are deeply divided on the issue. Based on pastors' reports, only about 32% of disaffiliating congregations experienced any conflict around LGBTQ+ issues, compared to 45% of congregations remaining with the UMC.

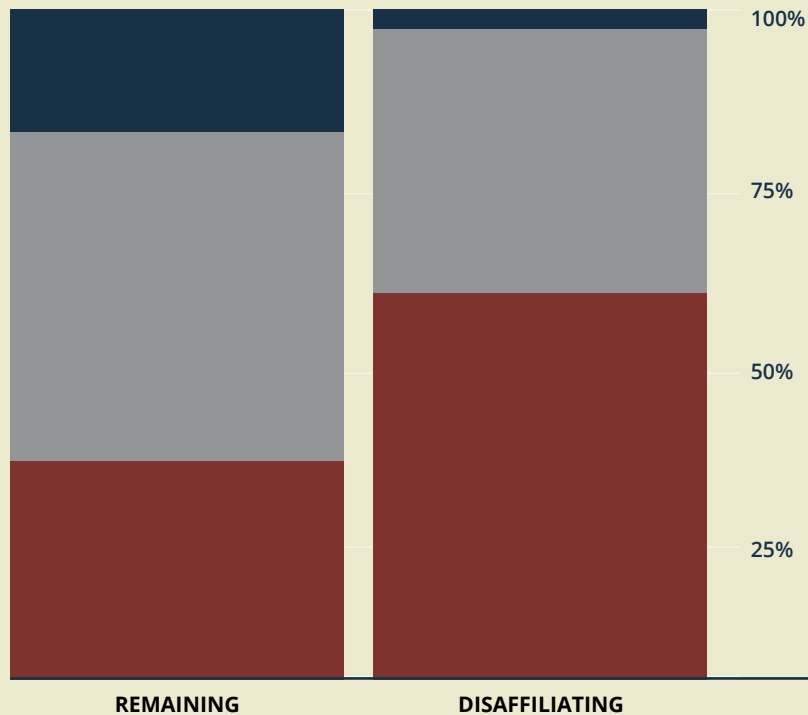
These divisions extend to politics as well, as remaining congregations are much more likely to be politically divided while disaffiliating congregations tend to solidly support Trump.

Among congregations remaining with the UMC, 57% had mixed support for the two major party candidates, 25% mostly supported Trump, and 18% mostly supported Biden. Disaffiliating congregations, instead, were much more uniform.

Figure 5: Percentage of Congregations That Mostly Supported Biden, Trump or Were Politically Mixed by Congregational Disaffiliation Status, 2021

Support within congregation for clergy performing same-sex marriages:

- 2/3rd voted for Biden
- Politically Mixed
- 2/3rd voted for Trump

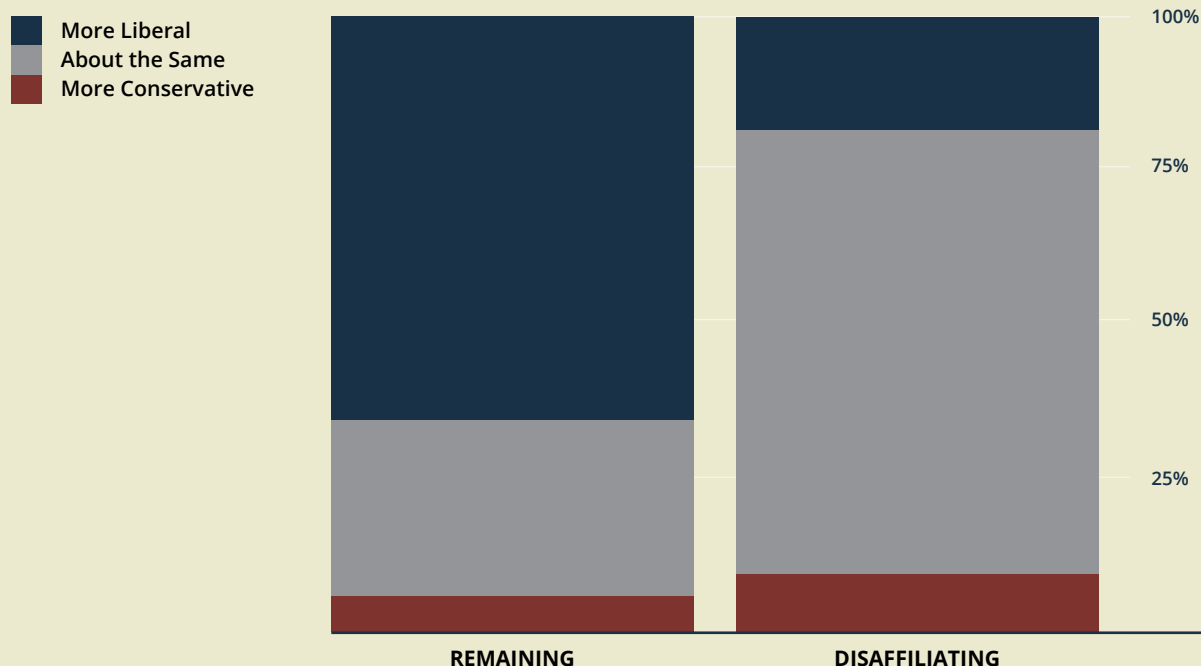


Among disaffiliating congregations, about 72% of congregants supported Trump in the 2020 election, and only 22% supported Biden. Remaining congregations, instead, were almost evenly split: an average of 46% of their members supported Biden, and 48% supported Trump. As with views on same-sex marriage, we can divide congregations into three categories based on the political leanings of their members: pro-Trump congregations in which more than two-thirds supported Trump in 2020, pro-Biden congregations where more than two-thirds supported Biden, and mixed congregations that fall between the two. As shown in Figure 5, remaining congregations are far more likely to be politically divided. Among congregations remaining with the UMC, 57% had mixed support for the two major party candidates, 25% mostly supported Trump, and 18% mostly supported Biden. Disaffiliating congregations, instead, were much more uniform. Nearly three quarters (74%) supported Trump, 23% were politically mixed, and only 3% primarily supported Biden.

Political division among remaining UMC congregations also extends to division between clergy and laity. Remaining pastors are not only more liberal than disaffiliating pastors, but they also tend to be more liberal than their laity. As shown in Figure 6, Over half (59%) of NC pastors staying in the UMC say they are at least somewhat more liberal than most people within their congregation, and only 28% say they are politically about the same. Looking at survey data from 2023, 5% say they are somewhat or much more

Over half (59%) of NC pastors staying in the UMC say they are at least somewhat more liberal than most people within their congregation, and only 28% say they are politically about the same.

Figure 6:
Political Alignment with Congregation by Clergy Disaffiliation Status, 2021



5 See Roso, Joseph and Mark Chaves. 2023. "Clergy-lay political (mis)alignment in 2019-2020." *Politics and Religion* 16(3):533-542. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048323000172>

conservative, 27% say they are about the same, 46% say they are somewhat more liberal and 21% say they are much more liberal. Disaffiliating pastors, instead, are much more politically aligned with their congregants. Over two-thirds (71%) say they are about the same as most of their congregants, and only 16% say they are more liberal. This is analogous to differences in clergy-lay political alignment within congregations more broadly, as conservative clergy typically say they are well matched with their congregation, while mainline clergy tend to say they are more liberal than their congregants.⁵

Somewhat paradoxically, the outcome of these trends means that while the UMC as a whole is becoming more liberal due to the exodus of the most conservative pastors and congregations, a greater share of congregations within the denomination will have members with diverse theological and political viewpoints. This is because some of the most politically uniform congregations disaffiliated, while many of the congregations that are staying are more politically and theologically diverse.

For clergy remaining in the UMC, negotiating political and theological division within their congregations will remain an important challenge. It is also vitally important for seminaries that train younger clergy, who are more often progressive on political and social issues, to cultivate the skills to pastor congregations that are mixed theologically and politically. As discussed in more detail in

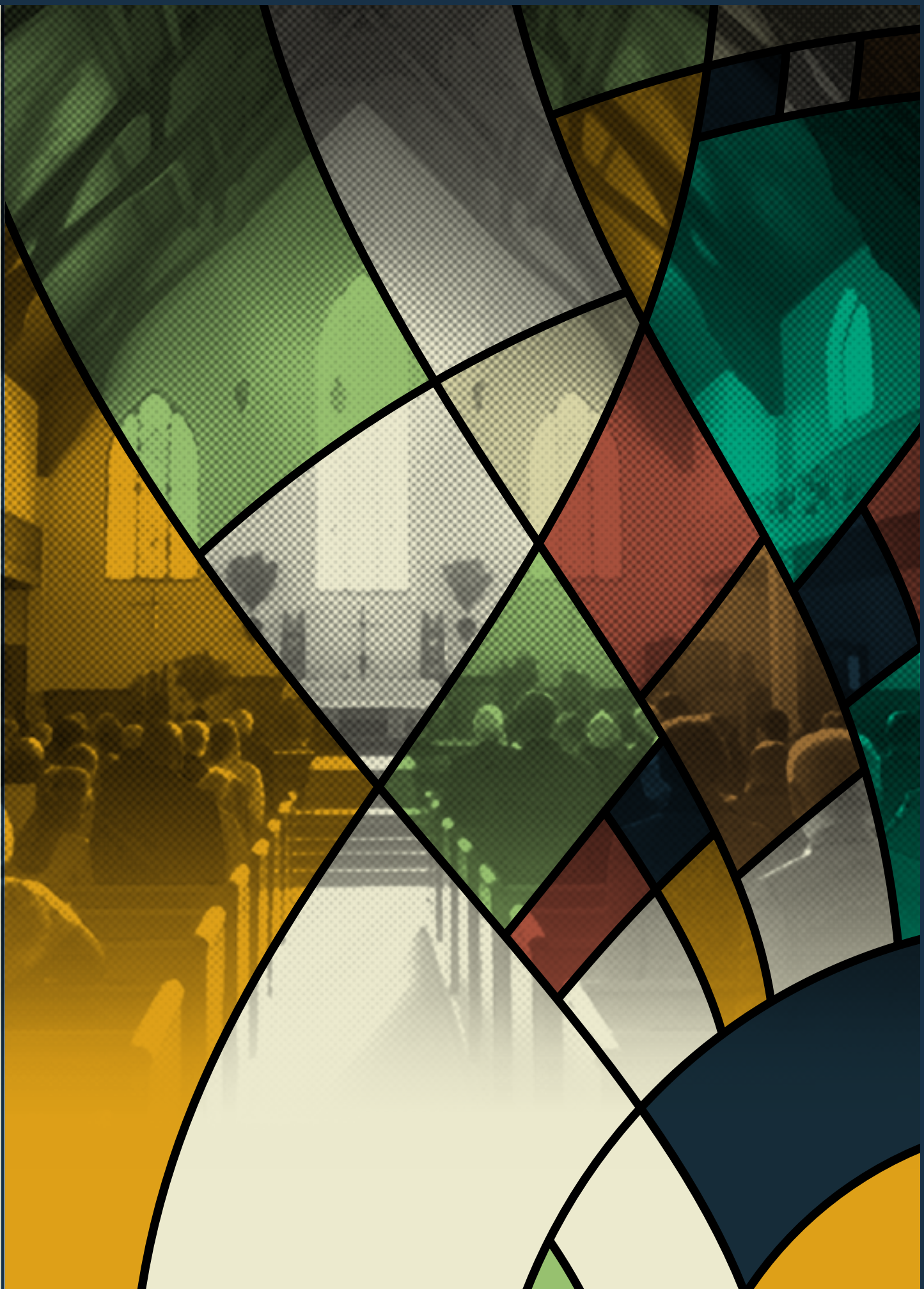
a later section, clergy remaining with the UMC score relatively high on measures of symptoms consistent with depression, anxiety, and burnout. We have completed preliminary analyses that have shown managing conflict is associated with increased levels of occupational distress.⁶ This underscores the need for pastors to receive training in managing conflict and division in their congregations. But the presence of politically and theologically diverse congregations is an important opportunity for the denomination. Most other institutions in American society are split along ideological lines, but many UMC congregations contain a mix of people from different political persuasions. Even after the schism, UMC congregations will remain important places where Democrats and Republicans share life together. Whether churches can stay politically diverse is an open question. Americans continue to segregate politically, and maintaining community across partisan lines requires concerted effort on the part of pastors, lay and denominational leaders.

KEY POINTS

Clergy remaining with the UMC are more politically and theologically misaligned with their congregants than those leaving the UMC.

Clergy remaining with the UMC oversee more politically and theologically divided congregations, while disaffiliating clergy oversee more unified congregations.

⁶ Please contact David Eagle for information on this study.



CONGREGATIONAL FEATURES



Remaining Congregations are Slightly Larger and More Urban Than Disaffiliating Congregations

Both the North Carolina and Western North Carolina conferences have held their final sessions to confirm congregational disaffiliations, and the hard deadline of December 31st, 2023 in ¶ 2553 has expired, effectively closing the book on disaffiliation. All told, 671 United Methodist congregations in North Carolina have disaffiliated from the denomination, representing 35% of the United Methodist congregations in North Carolina. This includes 325 congregations in the North Carolina Conference, and 346 in the Western North Carolina Conference. Of these congregations, all but four (one in the WNCC and three in the NCC) were identified and matched with geo-coded data. The following results come from the 1,880 present and former UMC congregations with complete geo-coded data.

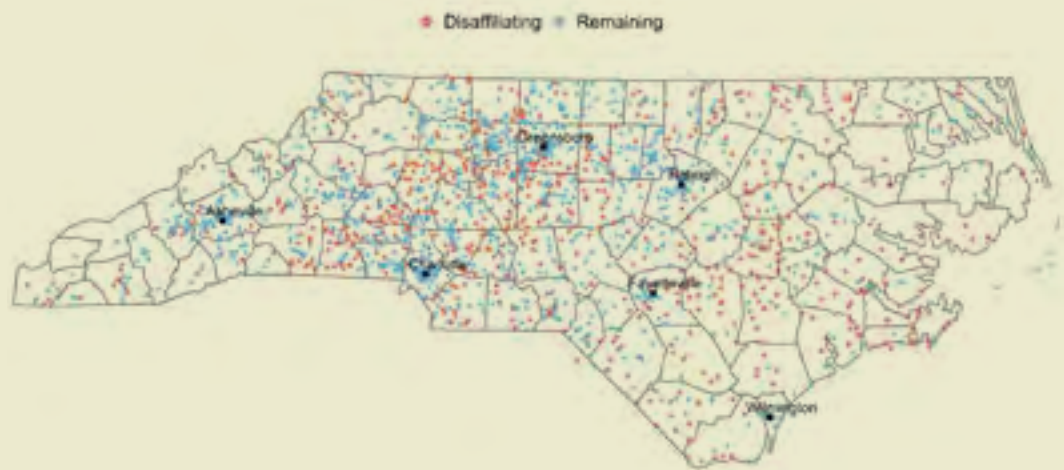
Congregations representing 139,361 (29%) UMC members and 38,444 (32%) regular attenders have disaffiliated from either the NCC or WNCC. Are there patterns in which churches are disaffiliating? What are the key differences between disaffiliating and remaining congregations?

First of all, there are important geographic differences. A map of all current or former UMC congregations and their disaffiliation status is

shown in Figure 7. Disaffiliation is widespread, with churches from across the state electing to leave the denomination. However, there are some notable regional patterns. Namely, disaffiliating congregations tend to be more rural. Congregations that have left the UMC are scattered across less densely populated areas of the state, and relatively few are in urban centers like Charlotte or Raleigh. On the map in Figure 7, it is clear that urban areas around major cities with dense clusters of churches are mostly made up of congregations remaining within the UMC.

Using urban-rural definitions provided by the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that 41% of remaining UMC congregations are in urban tracts, compared to only 20% of disaffiliating congregations. Similarly, 37% of remaining UMC congregations are in rural census tracts, compared to 44% of disaffiliating congregations.⁷ Clearly there is a rural-urban pattern that dovetails with larger rural-urban cleavages in the country, but it is not the case that rural congregations are the only ones disaffiliating from the denomination. A majority of disaffiliating congregations are in Census-defined metropolitan areas.

Figure 7:
Map of UMC Congregations in North Carolina by Disaffiliation Status

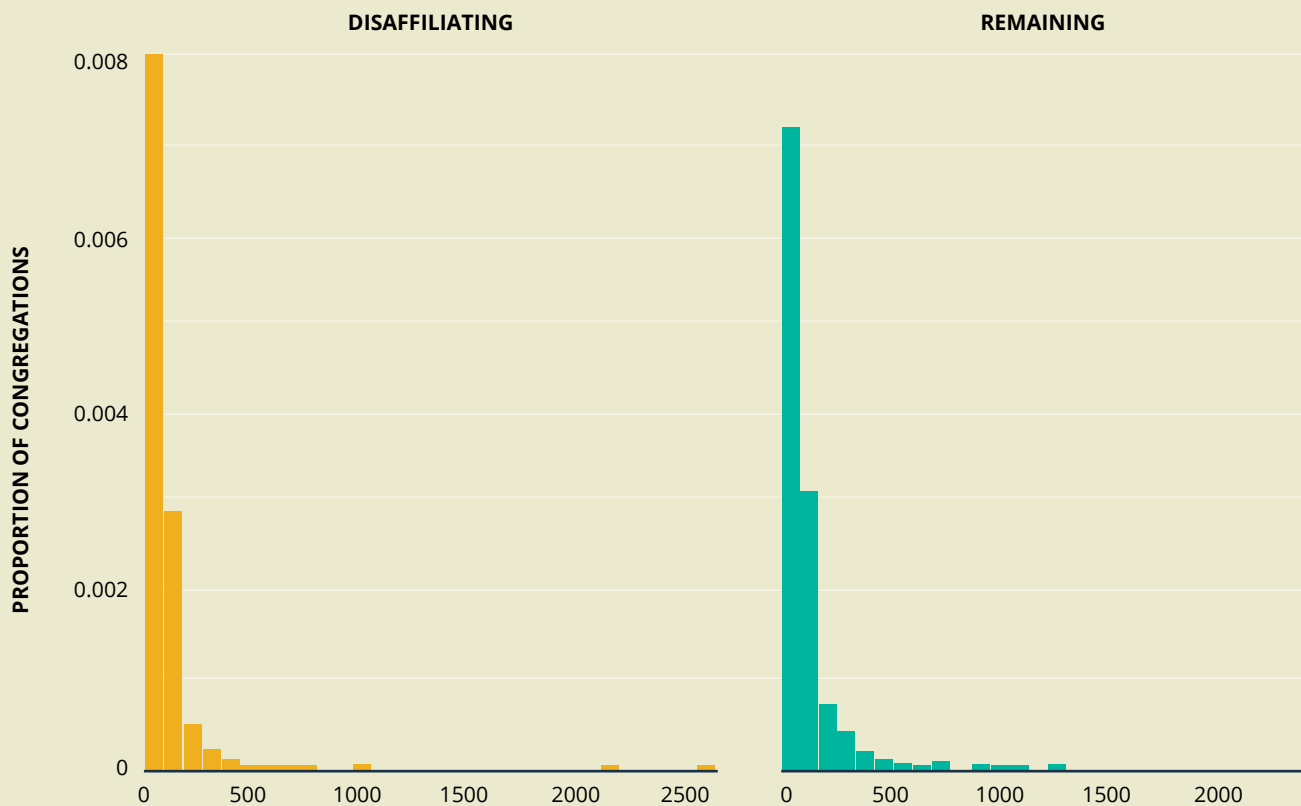


⁷ Each Census tract is classified using its Census-designated Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code based on the population density, urbanization, and commuting patterns within the tract. RUCA codes range from 1 to 10, with one being the most urban and ten being the most rural. For this analysis, tracts with a code of 1 are classified as "urban," and tracts with a code of 4 or higher are classified as "rural."

There are also differences in size between disaffiliating and remaining congregations, but these differences are much less pronounced. Disaffiliating congregations tend to be smaller than congregations remaining with the UMC, but only negligibly so. The median congregation remaining with the denomination has about 123 members and a regular attendance of 32. The median congregation leaving the UMC is slightly smaller, with 116 members and 30 regular attendees. While disaffiliating congregations tend to be smaller, many medium-to-large congregations are leaving. About 10% of congregations leaving the denomination have 100 or more regular attendees compared to 18% of churches remaining with the UMC. Figure 8 shows a comparison of the size distribution between congregations that are staying with the UMC and those that are leaving. Churches leaving the denomination are only a little more likely to be smaller, but congregations of all sizes are choosing to disaffiliate.

This pattern is slightly different between the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Conferences, as shown in Appendix Table 4. Within the North Carolina conference, remaining congregations are quite a bit larger than disaffiliating congregations. The median congregation remaining in the NCC had about 33 weekly attenders and 141 members, compared to 28 weekly attenders and 109 members for disaffiliating congregations. In the WNCC, disaffiliating congregations reported slightly more members and weekly attenders than remaining congregations, with a median of 32 weekly attenders and 122 members compared to 31 weekly attenders and 108 members for those remaining with the denomination. Of course, these are just the numbers reported by congregations, and those reporting their membership figures may have an incentive to present a slightly rosier

Figure 8:
Size Distribution of UMC Congregations in North Carolina by Disaffiliation Status, 2021



While disaffiliating congregations tend to be smaller, many medium-to-large congregations are leaving. About 10% of congregations leaving the denomination have 100 or more regular attendees compared to 18% of churches remaining with the UMC.

picture in their reports. Regardless, it is clear that disaffiliation is not a phenomenon restricted to very small congregations. Many medium- and large-sized congregations are disaffiliating as well.

The exodus of many congregations also represents the loss of apportionments to the denomination. Using 2020 financial records (the most recent available to us), we identified approximately how much the WNCC and NCC are poised to lose in

apportionment income following disaffiliation. Because of their slightly smaller size on average, disaffiliating congregations tended to have lower apportionments than remaining congregations. The median remaining congregation paid about \$6,400 in apportionments in 2020 compared to only about \$5,400 for disaffiliating congregations. However, disaffiliating congregations collectively represented a sizeable amount of income for the conferences. Congregations that disaffiliated contributed a total of \$6.5 million to the NCC and WNCC in 2020 – 24% of all apportionments to those two conferences.

There are also important differences in the racial makeup of congregations leaving the denomination. As a whole, the UMC in North Carolina is a predominantly white denomination, but the denomination may become at least a little more racially diverse following the split. Nearly all (98%) of congregations disaffiliating from the NCC or WNCC are predominantly white, and only 1% are predominantly Black. In comparison, 88% of North Carolina congregations staying with the UMC are predominantly white, and 10% are predominantly Black. The UMC is still a predominantly white denomination, but a large majority of predominantly Black UMC churches in the state are choosing to remain with the UMC. Disaffiliation will not radically alter the demographics of the UMC, but it will likely nudge the denomination towards more racial diversity.

KEY POINTS

- Churches of all sizes and geographies are leaving the denomination, but disaffiliating churches are slightly smaller and slightly more likely to be in rural areas.
- Churches leaving the WNCC and NCC represent a total loss of \$6.5 million in apportionments.
- Churches leaving the denomination are predominantly white, while those staying with the denomination are slightly more racially diverse.

CLERGY DEMOGRAPHICS



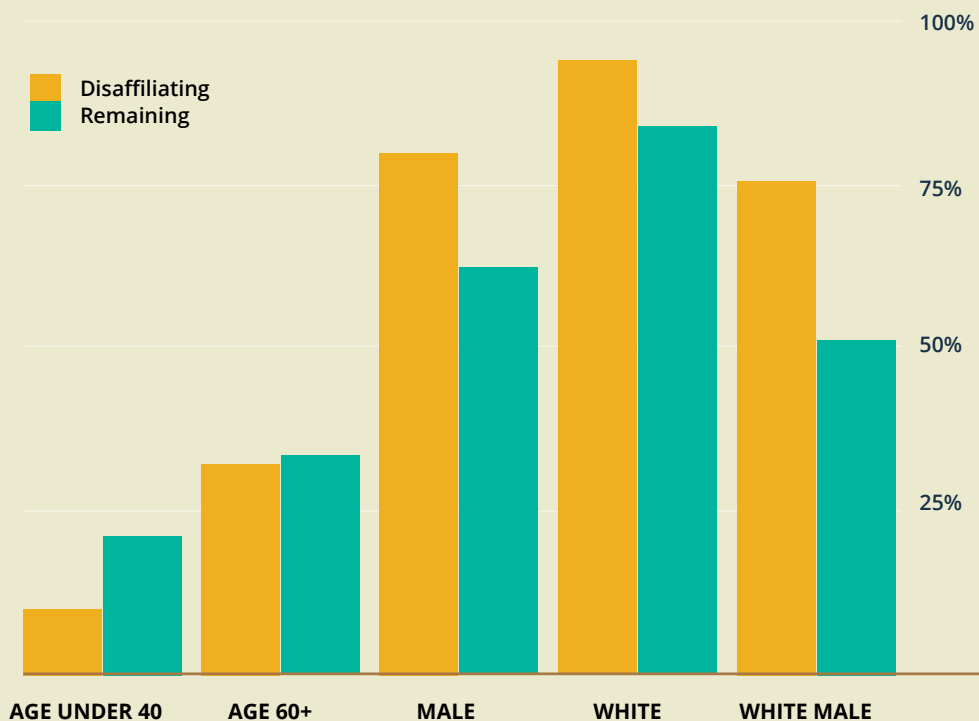
Disaffiliating Clergy Identify Overwhelming as White Men and Are Less Likely to Be Ordained

How will disaffiliation alter the demographics of UMC clergy going forward? In 2021, most North Carolina UMC clergy identified as white (87%), a majority were men (65%)⁸, and older (median age of 54). These figures are about the same as those for UMC clergy nationally and mainline Protestant clergy more generally.⁹

Clergy disaffiliating from the UMC conferences in North Carolina bear significant demographic differences than those remaining. A large percentage of clergy disaffiliating from the UMC are white-identified men. Fully 80% of disaffiliating clergy are men, a percentage that is not only higher than the rest of the UMC, but also higher than the 68% of mainline Protestant clergy nationwide who are men. Disaffiliating clergy are even more uniform in terms of race, as fully 94% of them identify as white and non-Hispanic. This may actually slightly understate the percentage of those disaffiliating who are

Fully 80% of disaffiliating clergy are men, a percentage that is not only higher than the rest of the UMC, but also higher than the 68% of mainline Protestant clergy nationwide who are men.

Figure 9:
Demographics of North Carolina UMC Clergy by Disaffiliation Status, 2021



⁸ This number just reflects clergy who responded to the survey, and often women are more likely to respond to surveys than men. However, according to 2021 conference rolls, 66.4% of UMC clergy in North Carolina were men, suggesting that the clergy who responded to the survey were quite similar to those who did not.

⁹ We compared NC UMC clergy data to data on national UMC clergy and mainline Protestant clergy from the National Survey of Religious Leaders (NSRL), a nationally representative survey of religious leaders conducted in 2019-20. For more information on the NSRL's methods, consult the NSRL's website at <https://sites.duke.edu/nsrl/>.

white. A significant number of disaffiliating clergy did not select “white” for their racial identity but selected “other,” and often those selecting this “other” category reported their race as “European-American” or “Caucasian” in the open-ended follow-up question. Altogether, at least three quarters (75%) of disaffiliating clergy are white-identified men. Disaffiliating and remaining clergy are, on average, about the same age (mean in the 54-56 range), but younger clergy are less likely to disaffiliate. About 1 in 5 (21%) remaining clergy are under the age of 40, while only 10% of disaffiliating clergy are that young. Figure 9 reports the demographic differences between remaining and disaffiliating clergy.

While these trends might suggest that UMC clergy may, as a group, become slightly more diverse on the basis of gender and race, the reality is somewhat different. Based on survey data from 2023, the denomination did not change racially. 86% of clergy continued to identify as white. However, the proportion of clergy who identified as men dropped from 65% prior to disaffiliation to 59% today.

Fully a quarter (26%) of the licensed local pastors in the NCC or WNCC are disaffiliating, compared to just 14% of ordained clergy.

Disaffiliating clergy also differ from remaining clergy in their employment situations. There are two types of clergy serving UMC congregations: fully ordained clergy who have guaranteed, usually full-time appointments (other clergy can be “provisionally ordained,” meaning they are on path to becoming fully ordained), and licensed local pastors who are appointed to lead a single congregation for one year and are not guaranteed an appointment. Local pastors often serve part-time appointments.

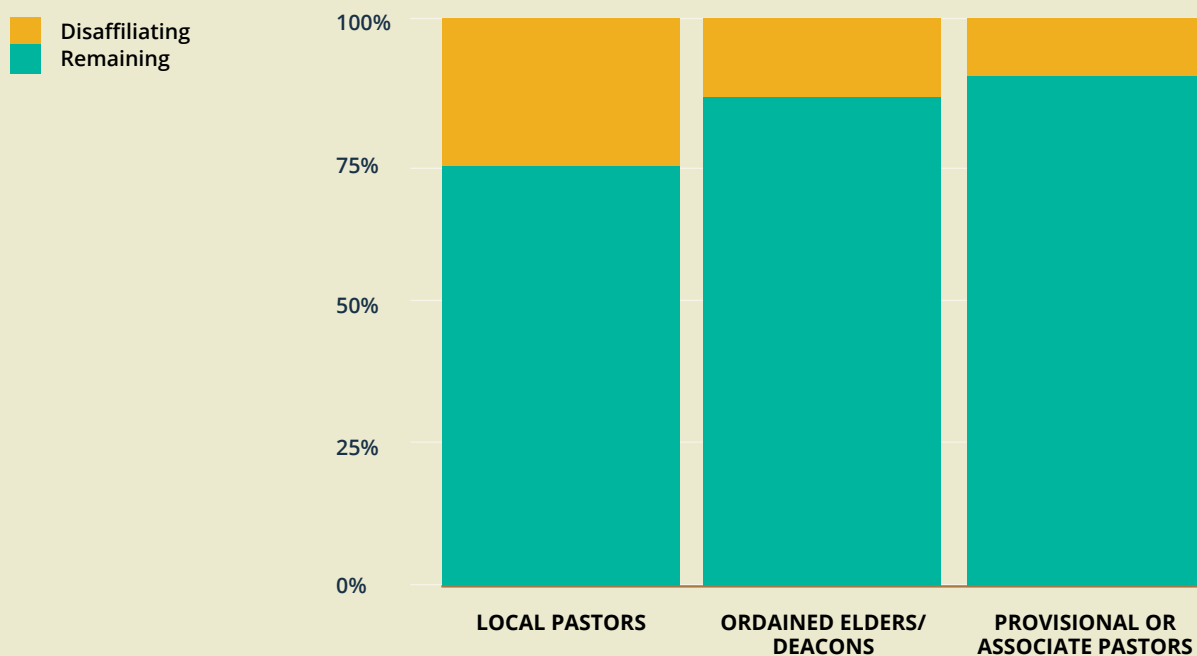
This distinction is important, as licensed local pastors are much more likely to disaffiliate than ordained clergy. As shown in Figure 10, fully a quarter (26%) of the licensed local pastors in the NCC or WNCC are disaffiliating, compared to just 14% of ordained clergy. While local pastors made up just 30% of the clergy in the NCC or WNCC prior to the schism, nearly half (46%) of those leaving the conferences are licensed local pastors. This means that, following the schism, a slightly larger percentage of UMC pastors will be ordained. In 2021, about 60% of UMC clergy in North Carolina were ordained ministers in full connection. This includes the 55% of clergy who were elders in full connection, and 5% of clergy who were deacons in full connection. Following the schism, those numbers are poised to increase slightly. About 62% of remaining clergy are ordained, including 57% of clergy who are elders.

Disaffiliating clergy also differ from remaining clergy in their occupational status and educational attainment. Disaffiliating clergy are more likely to work part-time in their ministerial role, serve multiple congregations, and be bi-vocational. Among those leaving the denomination, 35% work part-time, 29% serve more than one congregation, and 24% have another job besides congregational ministry. In comparison, among those remaining with the denomination, only 20% work part-time, 21% serve two or more congregations, and 9% are bi-vocational. Though most do have a master's level degree in ministry, disaffiliating clergy are less likely than remaining clergy to have advanced ministerial training. Nearly 4 in 5 (79%) clergy remaining with the denomination have a master's degree or higher in a ministerial field, while 66% of disaffiliating clergy do.

Unlike gender and race, educational attainment and occupational status are areas where the schism will make UMC clergy slightly less diverse. Prior to the schism, UMC clergy had very high levels of educational attainment and a majority were full-time professional clergy, but a meaningful percentage of clergy did not have advanced

ministerial training and served their congregations only in a part-time capacity. Prior to the schism, 23% of NC UMC clergy worked part-time, 12% were bi-vocational, and 24% did not have a master's degree in ministry. Following disaffiliation, those numbers are poised to drop slightly.

Figure 10:
Disaffiliation Among North Carolina UMC Pastors by Clergy Status, 2021



KEY POINTS

- Disaffiliating clergy identify overwhelmingly as white men.
- The proportion of female-identified clergy in the denomination increased.
- Contrary to expectations, the proportion identifying as white did not change.
- Disaffiliating clergy are much more likely to be licensed local pastors.
- UMC clergy will become more uniformly professionalized following the schism.

CLERGY HEALTH



*Remaining Clergy Are More Stressed
Out Than Disaffiliating Clergy*

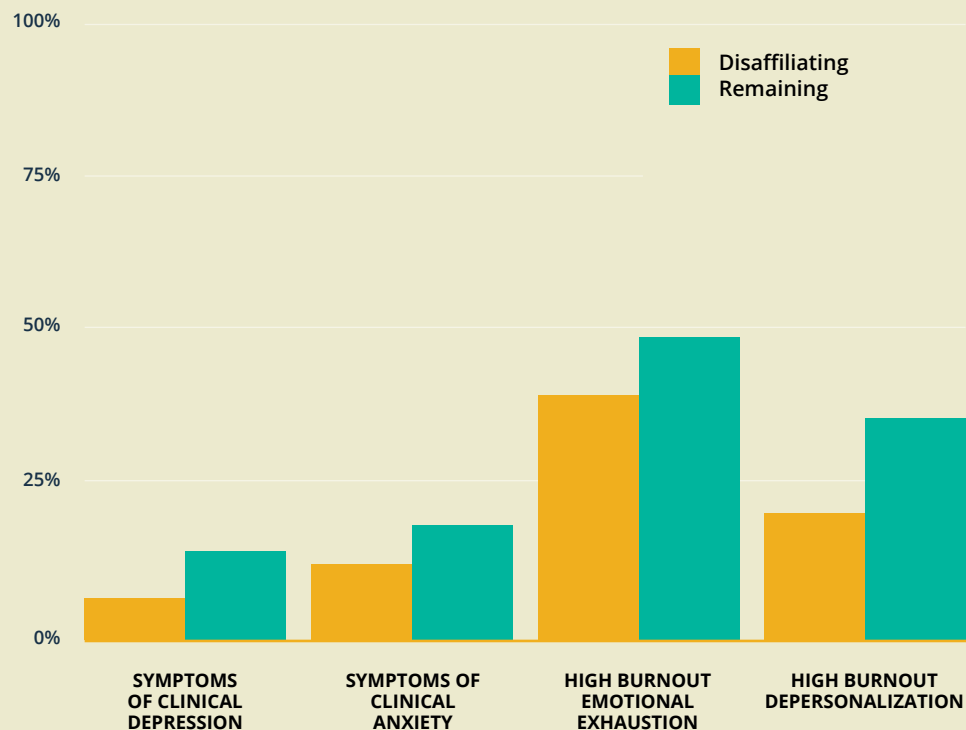
Clergy remaining with the UMC will need to continue to manage disagreement and conflict in their congregations. What will the mental and physical health status of remaining clergy look like? If many of the least stressed-out clergy leave the denomination, then a greater share of UMC clergy may be struggling mentally or emotionally, creating more challenges for UMC conferences.

In terms of physical health, remaining clergy are slightly healthier than those leaving the denomination. Clergy staying with the denomination have a lower body mass index (BMI) on average (30 vs 31), and lower prevalence rates of obesity (38% vs. 42%), diabetes (12% vs. 18%), high blood pressure (33% vs 36%), and high cholesterol (48% vs 53%). Likely these modest differences are a result of regional patterns in disaffiliation, as clergy in rural areas are more likely to leave the denomination than those in urban areas, and research has long shown that people living in the rural South have worse physical health.¹⁰ Regardless of the underlying explanation,

it does not appear that disaffiliation will exacerbate any challenges for the denomination in supporting the physical health of clergy. However, the physical health of UMC clergy in the state is poor, and this continues to be a pressing priority for the denomination.

This is not the case for mental health. Tracking the mental health of clergy has long been a priority of the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, and as such the CHI survey has many validated measures that assess clergy's rates of elevated depressive and anxiety symptoms, and indicators of occupational distress. Figure 11 reports key differences in mental health measures between disaffiliating and remaining clergy. Using these measures, we found that UMC clergy remaining with the denomination report higher rates of psychological distress, including more symptoms consistent with burnout, occupational distress, depression and anxiety.

Figure 11:
Mental Health Status of North Carolina UMC Clergy by Disaffiliation Status, 2021



Note: Clergy depressive symptoms were measured with the Patient Health Questionnaire-8 scale, anxiety symptoms with the General Anxiety Disorder-7 scale, and the measures of burnout from two subscales of the Maslach Burnout Index.

10 Charlotte E. Miller and Vasan, Ramachandran S. 2021. "The southern rural health and mortality penalty: A review of the regional health inequities in the United States." *Social Science & Medicine* 268. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113443>

While a simple survey instrument cannot diagnose people with any particular condition, the CHI does include empirically validated instruments designed to screen individuals for symptoms of depression or anxiety. The Patient Health Questionnaire – 8 (PHQ-8) assesses respondents for clinical symptoms of depression, including having “little interest or pleasure in doing things,” “feeling down, depressed, irritable, or hopeless,” and “feeling tired or having little energy.” Similarly, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) assesses a respondent’s anxiety symptoms by asking if they have recently experienced “feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge,” “worrying too much about different things,” or “feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.” Respondents who report sufficiently numerous and frequent symptoms are flagged as likely to have clinically significant depression (from the PHQ-8) or anxiety (GAD-7) if they were evaluated by a mental health professional.¹¹

Using the empirically validated threshold values for these measures, clergy remaining in the denomination are more likely to exhibit symptoms

of depression or anxiety. For depression, clergy remaining in the denomination are more than twice as likely to be flagged by the PHQ-8 as potentially having depression than disaffiliating clergy. Only 6% of disaffiliating clergy exhibit elevated symptoms of depression, but 14% of clergy remaining with the denomination do. The story is similar for anxiety. Based on the GAD-7 instrument, 12% of disaffiliating clergy exhibit symptoms of elevated anxiety, while 18% of clergy remaining with the denomination do. This means that clergy remaining with the denomination are about 50% more likely to have symptoms of anxiety than clergy leaving the denomination. As the disaffiliation process concludes, we might expect the mental health of remaining clergy to improve. We calculated the prevalence of symptoms consistent with depression and anxiety in 2023 and found little change. Depression prevalence dropped from 14% to 11%, but anxiety remained basically unchanged (a drop from 18% to 17%).

These trends extend to other areas of wellbeing. The CHI Survey includes the Clergy Occupational Distress Index (CODI), a scale designed specifically

Nearly half (49%) of all clergy remaining with the denomination report high levels of emotional exhaustion and over a third (36%) report high levels of depersonalization.

¹¹ For empirical validation of GAD-7 scale, see: Kroenke, Kurt, Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B. W. Williams, Patrick O. Monahan, and Bernd Löwe. 2007. “Anxiety Disorders in Primary Care: Prevalence, Impairment, Comorbidity, and Detection.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 146(5):317–25. For empirical validation of the PHQ-8 scale, see: Kroenke, Kurt, Tara W. Strine, Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B. W. Williams, Joyce T. Berry, and Ali H. Mokdad. 2009. “The PHQ-8 as a Measure of Current Depression in the General Population.” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 114(1–3):163–73.

for clergy to measure occupational distress. It includes questions such as “how often have the people in your congregation made too many demands of you,” and “how often have you felt lonely and isolated in your work,” with options ranging from “very often” to “never.” In the CHI Survey, the scale is coded to range from 0-15, with higher values indicating more occupational distress. On average, clergy remaining with the UMC score a full point higher on the CODI scale than clergy disaffiliating from the UMC (6.7 vs. 5.6). Prior to the schism, clergy who ultimately chose to remain with the denomination reported that their job was creating more distress for them than those who left the UMC.

The trends are similar when looking at burnout. The CHI Survey uses the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to assess how burned-out clergy feel. This includes two subscales of particular interest – the “emotional exhaustion” subscale which asks clergy if they feel “emotionally drained,” “used up,” or “frustrated” by their job, and a “depersonalization” scale that asks clergy if their job is “hardening them emotionally” or making them “more callous toward people.” For both scales, clergy remaining with the denomination are more likely to have elevated burnout symptoms based on cut-off scores from the MBI manual, indicating high rates of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in their work. Nearly half (49%) of all clergy remaining with the denomination report high levels of emotional

exhaustion and over a third (36%) report high levels of depersonalization. The analogous figures for disaffiliating clergy are lower. About 40% of disaffiliating clergy report high levels of emotional exhaustion and only 20% report high levels of depersonalization. While these differences show that symptoms of burnout are concerning among all clergy, they suggest that clergy who are choosing to stay with the UMC experience more burnout than those who are disaffiliating. Looking at these measures in 2023, we did not witness any significant changes. CODI scores dropped from 6.7 to 6.3, but emotional exhaustion increased from 49% to 51% and depersonalization stayed the same at 36%.

Going forward, these mental health findings pose a critical challenge for the denomination. Not only is the schism creating significant stressors for clergy remaining with the UMC, but UMC clergy remaining in the denomination already had higher levels of occupational distress and elevated anxiety and depression symptoms than those who chose to leave. While there are some promising signs that elevated depressive symptoms may have declined, assessing and attending to clergy mental health remains a critically important need.

KEY POINTS

— Clergy remaining with the denomination have slightly better physical health than those disaffiliating.

— Clergy remaining with the denomination have higher rates of depression, anxiety, burnout, and occupational distress than those disaffiliating.

FINAL NOTE

Differences between the WNCC and the NCC

Thus far, all of the analyses in this report have combined data from clergy affiliated with the NCC and WNCC. However, these are entirely separate conferences that have each set forward their own disaffiliation process. Appendix Tables 3 and 4 report data broken down by Annual Conference. On the whole, the two conferences are remarkably similar. Disaffiliating clergy from both conferences are more theologically and politically conservative, better politically aligned with their laity, more likely to be licensed local pastors, more likely to be white men, and pastor much less theologically mixed congregations than clergy remaining with their respective conferences.

While the patterns of disaffiliation remain largely consistent across conferences, there are some differences worth noting. In the WNCC leavers and remainers are more similar in their vocational situations than they are in the NCC. WNCC disaffiliating clergy are still more likely to be licensed local pastors, bivocational, or part-time than remaining WNCC pastors, but the differences between those groups is smaller than it is in the NCC. Furthermore, unlike NCC clergy, disaffiliating clergy from the WNCC are actually very slightly less likely than remaining clergy to pastor more than one congregation (22% of WNCC leavers do compared to 25% of WNCC remainers).

These slightly different patterns in the vocational features of leaving and remaining clergy between the conferences may be a result of compositional differences in the clergy within each conference. A larger percentage of NCC clergy were local pastors prior to the split (39% compared to 24% among the WNCC), which also may help explain why there was more clergy disaffiliation from the NCC than the WNCC (22% vs. 15%). This can offer insight into how disaffiliation might differ from conference to conference. Conferences that rely more on licensed local pastors will likely suffer more disaffiliations and, consequently, more significant shifts in the makeup of the conference following the schism.



CONCLUSION

Challenges and Opportunities

The ongoing schism is one of the most significant events in the history of the United Methodist Church, and the fallout will profoundly alter the trajectory of the denomination. The split will certainly pose many challenges for the UMC as it tries to navigate a post-disaffiliation reality. However, it also offers some key opportunities for the UMC to continue to expand and embrace its role as a “Big Tent” denomination in the coming years. Cultivating churches that can hold differences without division is difficult work for clergy and lay leaders. A strategy of more progressive leaders may be to press forward an agenda to promote full inclusion. This is likely to create more conflict and division. There are still a significant minority of clergy and something closer to a majority of UMC attendees who do not affirm same-sex relationships. A better approach would emphasize helping clergy and lay leaders increase trust and build churches that can maintain diversity without division.

The schism will no doubt strain denominational resources to support clergy and congregations. Even if disaffiliating congregations supported the denomination less than those remaining, losing one third of churches and about a quarter of apportionment income will have a major negative impact on denominational resources.

There will also be challenges for clergy as they negotiate a multitude of stressors and try to mend deeply divided congregations. A recurring theme throughout the data is that the schism is not a clean split between uniformly conservative clergy and congregations on one side and uniformly liberal clergy and congregations on the other. Clergy and congregations leaving are fairly uniform in their theological and political conservatism, as well as their belief that people in same-sex relationships should not be allowed to hold religious leadership positions. Those remaining in the denomination, however, exhibit substantially more political and theological diversity than perhaps is expected. A non-trivial number of the remaining clergy still hold conservative views on human sexuality, and remaining congregations are far more likely to be politically and theologically divided. Clergy remaining with the UMC are also much more likely to pastor congregations with different political views than their own. As a result, there will be an even greater need for mental health support for UMC clergy following the split, as clergy remaining with the denomination were also already more likely to report symptoms of burnout, occupational stress, anxiety, and depression. Learning to care for others while caring for themselves will be a necessary skill to continue to cultivate.

By proceeding with care, empathy, and skillfulness, the UMC can become a model of a different kind of community for a culture so often divided by politics, race, class, and creed.

Navigating the schism has been incredibly challenging for congregational and denominational leaders. While the journey through this time has been difficult, there is also hope that the UMC will emerge from the other side of this crisis better positioned to fulfill its mission and expand its ministry to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*Book of Discipline*, pg. v). Our projections suggest that the UMC in North Carolina will contain a greater percentage of politically and theologically diverse congregations. The most conservative leaders and congregations have left the UMC, meaning that the denomination will become more politically and theologically liberal on average, but many of the congregations remaining with the UMC are home to people with divergent political and theological views. This uniquely positions the UMC within an increasingly polarized context as one of the few institutions that can foster relationships that cross left-right divides. Going forward, a UMC congregation may be one of the only places in the country where someone can

meet and form a meaningful bond with a person who holds different political views. This presents an important opportunity for churches to build loving relationships between people from different political camps. By proceeding with care, empathy, and skillfulness, the UMC can become a model of a different kind of community for a culture so often divided by politics, race, class, and creed.

Certainly, the schism is painful and difficult. Congregants have experienced division in churches they have attended and loved for years, clergy will continue to manage discord and stress among their flock, and denominational leadership will have to reorient itself to new financial and administrative realities. But the need for the Church remains. As the makeup of its congregations, clergy, and laity shift, the UMC will have to adapt as it continues its ministry in an increasingly fractured world.

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Disaffiliating and Remaining Clergy, 2021 Data (n = 949)

	STAYING (82.5%)	LEAVING (17.5%)	NON-MISSING VALUES
Race and gender			
Race = white	83.9%	93.9%	936
Male	62.5%	79.9%	903
White male	51.1%	75.3%	912
Age			
Under 40 years old	21.3%	9.7%	907
60+ years old	32.8%	32.3%	907
Mean age	51.6	54.1	907
Median age	54	56	907
Master's degree or higher	78.7%	65.7%	906
Clergy status			
Fully ordained	61.7%	46.4%	947
Licensed local pastor	26.5%	45.8%	947
Occupational features			
Bi-vocational	9.4%	24.1%	945
Works full-time	80.2%	65.1%	948
Serve 2+ congregations	21.3%	28.5%	938
PartyID			
Democrat	44.2%	6.2%	864
Independent	41.0%	43.4%	864
Republican	7.9%	39.3%	864
Politics compared to congregation			
More conservative	5.2%	8.4%	842
About the same	27.9%	70.7%	842
More liberal	59.4%	16.3%	842
Congregants' support for clergy marrying same-sex couples			
Mean % of cong "strongly" in favor	30.1	7.9	594
Mean % of cong "strongly" opposed	53.3	86.6	596
Reported some conflict over LGBTQ+ issues within congregation	46.6%	28.2%	578

	STAYING	LEAVING	NON-MISSING VALUES
Theology			
Agree that L/G people can be religious leaders	65.2%	6.3%	577
Disagree that L/G people can be religious leaders	23.8%	84.7%	577
Important to convert people of other faiths	23.3%	52.2%	593
All people will eventually be saved	39.4%	8.8%	590
Views of Bible			
Bible actual word of God to be taken literally, word-for-word	2.7%	1.7%	594
Bible IS inspired word of God, without errors	22.8%	72.3%	594
Bible IS inspired word of God, but some historical inaccuracies	72.9%	25.2%	594
Bible is NOT inspired word of God, but has relevant wisdom for today	1.7%	0.0%	594
Bible is a mix of legends with little relevance for today	0.0%	0.1%	594
Physical health			
Mean BMI	30.3	31.1	894
Obese	37.8%	42.5%	894
Diabetes	11.8%	18.1%	903
High blood pressure	33.2%	36.1%	903
High cholesterol	48.2%	52.9%	794
Mental illness			
PHQ-8 flagged as possibly clinically depressed	14.2%	6.0%	949
GAD-7 flagged as possibly clinically anxious	18.0%	12.0%	949
Occupational distress and burnout			
Occupational distress (CODI, 0-15)	6.7	5.6	949
High emotional exhaustion (MHI)	48.9%	39.8%	949
High depersonalization (MHI)	35.8%	20.5%	949

Data Source: 2021 Clergy Health Initiative Statewide Longitudinal Survey

TABLE 2

Characteristics of Disaffiliating and Remaining Churches

	STAYING, N=1,209	LEAVING, N=671	2021 TOTAL N=1,880 HERE
Census Tract Location			
Urban core (RUCA = 1)	40.8%	19.9%	33.3%
Rural (RUCA >= 4)	37.1%	43.9%	39.5%
Attendance			
Total	80,753	38,444	119,197
Mean	66.6	57.6	63.4
Median	32	30	30
30 or fewer	49.1%	51.9%	50.1%
100+	17.6%	10.3%	15.1%
Membership			
Total	337,217	139,361	476,578
Mean	278.0	208.9	253
Median	123	116	120
Apportionment Paid (2020) ^a			
Total	\$20,629,778	\$6,511,066	\$27,140,844
Mean	\$18,224	\$9,747	\$15,078
Median	\$6,484	\$5,380	\$6,090
Political Alignment ^b			
Mean % of congregants supporting Biden	46.2	22.1	39.2
Mean % of congregants supporting Trump	47.5	72.4	54.8
2/3rds or more supported Biden	20.4%	2.0%	15.1%
2/3rds or more supported Trump	26.5%	68.2%	38.6%
Politically mixed	53.1%	29.8%	46.3%
Views on same-sex marriage ^b			
Mean % of congregants who strongly support same-sex marriage	32.3	8.6	24.9
Mean % of congregants who strongly oppose same-sex marriage	51.0	82.7	60.9
2/3rds or more strongly support same-sex marriage	11.3%	8.6%	8.0%
2/3rds or more strongly oppose same-sex marriage	32.4%	82.7%	47.3%
Mixed views on same-sex marriage	56.4%	0.6%	44.7%
At least "some conflict" on LGBTQ+ issues ^b	44.7%	33.8%	41.3%
Predominant Ethnicity			
White	87.7%	97.8%	91.3%
Black	9.9%	0.9%	6.7%
Asian, multiracial, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, or other	2.4%	1.3%	2.0%

Data Source: United Methodist Church, 2023

^a Only including the 1,800 congregations with complete 2020 financial data.

^b These numbers were derived from clergy's reports in the 2021 CHI Survey.

Note: Only including data from the 1,880 congregations that could be matched with geo-coded data

TABLE 3

Differences Between Disaffiliating and Remaining Clergy Across Conferences

	NCC		WNCC	
	STAYING (78%)	LEAVING (22%)	STAYING (85%)	LEAVING (15%)
Race and gender				
Race = white	81.3%	93.9%	85.6%	94.0%
Male	62.9%	78.2%	62.1%	81.6%
White male	49.1%	71.8%	52.3%	78.9%
Age				
Under 40 years old	29.0%	9.0%	16.4%	10.4%
60+ years old	32.4%	37.2%	33.0%	27.3%
Mean age				
Master's degree or higher	80.7%	57.8%	77.3%	73.5%
Clergy status				
Fully ordained	57.5%	38.6%	64.2%	52.2%
Licensed local pastor	35.5%	60.2%	26.6%	38.6%
Occupational features				
Bi-vocational	8.7%	32.5%	9.8%	15.7%
Works full-time	77.1%	50.6%	82.3%	79.5%
Serve 2+ congregations	15.7%	34.9%	24.9%	22.0%
PartyID				
Democrat	44.5%	4.2%	44.2%	8.2%
Independent	40.9%	50.0%	41.2%	37.0%
Republican	6.0%	37.5%	8.9%	41.1%
Politics compared to congregation				
More conservative	3.7%	9.6%	6.0%	7.2%
About the same	27.6%	72.5%	28.2%	69.0%
More liberal	61.8%	13.3%	58.0%	19.3%
Congregants' support for clergy marrying same-sex couples				
Mean % of cong "strongly" in favor	31.2	5.2	29.5	10.5
Mean % of cong "strongly" opposed	53.9	88.9	52.8	84.2
Reported some conflict over LGBTQ+ issues within congregation	47.0%	25.9%	46.6%	30.5%

TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)

Differences Between Disaffiliating and Remaining Clergy Across Conferences

	NCC		WNCC	
	STAYING	LEAVING	STAYING	LEAVING
Theology				
Agree that L/G people can be religious leaders	65.2%	3.5%	65.5%	9.3%
Disagree that L/G people can be religious leaders	23.4%	89.5%	23.8%	79.6%
Important to convert people of other faiths	22.8%	44.8%	23.4%	60.0%
All people will eventually be saved	41.4%	6.9%	38.4%	10.7%
Views of Bible				
Bible actual word of God to be taken literally, word-for-word	3.7%	1.7%	2.1%	1.8%
Bible IS inspired word of God, without errors	20.1%	76.3%	24.2%	67.9%
Bible IS inspired word of God, but some historical inaccuracies	75.1%	22.0%	71.6%	28.6%
Bible is NOT inspired word of God, but has relevant wisdom for today	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%
Bible is a mix of legends with little relevance for today	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
Physical health				
Mean BMI	29.9	31.0	30.5	31.1
Obese	39.9%	43.6%	36.5%	41.3%
Diabetes	8.9%	16.7%	13.6%	19.5%
High blood pressure	33.0%	35.9%	33.1%	36.4%
High cholesterol	44.3%	53.0%	50.7%	52.9%
Mental illness				
PHQ-8 flagged as possibly clinically depressed	15.3%	6.0%	13.5%	6.0%
GAD-7 flagged as possibly clinically anxious	19.9%	14.5%	16.8%	9.6%
Occupational distress and burnout				
Occupational distress (CODI)	7.1	5.3	6.5	5.9
High emotional exhaustion (MHI)	50.8%	37.3%	47.8%	42.2%
High depersonalization (MHI)	42.2%	15.7%	31.6%	25.3%

Data Source: 2021 Clergy Health Initiative Statewide Longitudinal Survey

TABLE 4

Characteristics of Disaffiliating and Remaining Churches Across Conferences

	NCC, N=788		WNCC, n=1092	
	STAYING, N=463	LEAVING, N=325	STAYING, N=746	LEAVING, N=346
Census Tract Location				
Urban core (RUCA = 1)	29.1%	10.6%	48.1%	28.6%
Rural (RUCA >= 4)	51.3%	57.5%	28.3%	31.2%
Attendance				
Total	34,837	15,499	45,916	22,945
Mean	73.3	48.1	62.2	66.5
Median	33	28	31	32
30 or fewer	47.8%	56.5%	49.9%	47.5%
100+	19.2%	8.4%	16.7%	12.2%
Membership				
Total	156,060	61,699	181,157	77,662
Mean	328.5	191.6	245.5	225.1
Median	141	109	107.5	122
Apportionment Paid (2020)^a				
Total	\$10,741,097	\$3,521,028	\$9,888,699	\$2,990,038
Mean	\$23,300	\$10,867	\$14,737	\$8,692
Median	\$8,549	\$6,234	\$5,657	\$4,733
Political Alignment^b				
Mean % of congregants supporting Biden	47.0	24.1	44.8	19.9
Mean % of congregants supporting Trump	46.9	70.3	48.8	74.7
2/3rds or more supported Biden	18.4%	2.8%	21.2%	1.3%
2/3rds or more supported Trump	24.5%	74.3%	27.9%	62.6%
Politically mixed	57.1%	22.9%	50.9%	36.1%
Views on same-sex marriage^b				
Mean % of congregants who strongly support same-sex marriage	33.2	7.4	31.2	9.5
Mean % of congregants who strongly oppose same-sex marriage	51.9	84.1	50.7	81.5
2/3rds or more strongly support same-sex marriage	8.7%	0.0%	15.0%	1.3%
2/3rds or more strongly oppose same-sex marriage	31.5%	77.7%	33.1%	84.4%
Mixed views on same-sex marriage	59.8%	22.3%	51.9%	14.3%
At least "some conflict" on LGBTQ+ issues^b				
Predominant Ethnicity				
White	90.9%	96.9%	85.6%	98.6%
Black	6.3%	0.6%	12.2%	1.2%
Asian, multiracial, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, or other	2.7%	2.5%	2.2%	2.9%

Data Source: United Methodist Church, 2023

Note: Only including data from the 1,880 congregations that could be matched with geo-coded data



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