



Coffee Conversations – Questions from Session 1: Methodist History with Racial Justice

1. Is there resistance of African-American churches to becoming reconciling churches?

United Methodist churches have not been surveyed on their willingness to become reconciling congregations. However, the 2024 Lewis Center Report on Disaffiliating United Methodist Churches offers some insights on the demographics of disaffiliating churches that have left the United Methodist denomination since 2019. It found that disaffiliating churches are disproportionately white. Although United Methodist churches with an African-American majority made up 7.2% of UMC congregations, they made up only 1.6% of disaffiliations. In contrast, churches with a white majority made up 89.6% of UMC congregations but were 97.4% of disaffiliations.

2. Are churches who are disassociating acting in anticipation of annual conference actions?

Not sure what “annual conference actions” are being referenced here. It would be fair to say that the Minnesota Annual Conference has been clear in their vision statement that they will not be bringing charges to clergy who preside over same-gender marriage ceremonies, nor disqualifying queer candidates for ordained ministry solely based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some churches have decided that they do not align with those values, so they have chosen to disaffiliate to either join the Global Methodist Church (GMC) or become an independent church (not affiliated with a denomination).

It's important to understand the process of disaffiliation is not an easy one. It typically involves buying your church building from the Annual Conference and paying two years' worth of apportionments plus any that had previously been due. It's expensive to disaffiliate. In anticipation of a schism, the MN Annual Conference allowed for a two-year (I think) grace period where the rules around disaffiliation were amended to make it easier for churches who truly felt they needed to go could do so. The metaphor of an “amicable divorce” was used. This for sure affected the number of churches who were considering disaffiliation to do so before the grace period was up and the standard procedure for disaffiliation were brought back.

In anticipation of the 2024 General Conference, from what I've heard the jury is still very much out on how things will go there, specifically pertaining to the Book of Discipline's language and doctrine around human sexuality. It is possible that some churches are disaffiliating prior to General Conference.

4. The “Action Project.” Needs greater publicity. How do we get involved?

When asked this Fall, after the cohort had begun, if people could join this year and Dr. Rev. Jia requested that people wait to join until the next cohort begins in the Fall of 2024. Updates regarding the project and how to register for Fall 2024 can be provided this summer in Centennial News.

5. Has there been an apology at any level for how Black people have been treated over time in the Methodist Church?

Centennial did write an apology for photos of members in blackface that are in the Centennial Archives.

6. We know that the UMC is a global organization. Is there a US level of organization before the state/conference level?

Yes. Between the Annual Conference level (Minnesota) and the General Conference level (whole world), we are a part of the North Central Jurisdiction. There are ten Annual Conferences within the North Central Jurisdictional Conference. There are five Jurisdictional Conferences in the US. Those Jurisdictional Conferences plus the seven Central Conferences which encapsulate the Annual Conferences in the rest of the world are the middle level of oversight and organization between Annual Conferences and the General Conference.

Centennial UMC < Minnesota Annual Conference < North Central Jurisdictional Conference < General Conference

7. Are there issues surrounding racial justice where Conferences have taken the lead to push churches or has it typically been individual churches pushing a Conference to take greater steps.

Yes. Both.

8. Have we considered a land acknowledgement? Are we ready for the commitment to action that an acknowledgement would require?

Centennial has not formalized its own land acknowledgement. Such a meaningful statement would need to be developed out of an authentic and continuing relationship with the Native American communities of this place, an unexplored call that still stands before our congregation.