



Bethany Operations as a Semi-Independent Church

Because Bethany is a larger church, operating the business of a semi-independent church is nearly identical to how we operate today. Bethany has a well-established structure in place for managing the church. We have talented, diverse, and committed lay leaders who guide our church on its Administrative Board and standing committees. None of our current operations are dependent upon being part of the UMC. Everything we do at Bethany can continue as a semi-independent church.

The Top Three Most Asked Questions about Operations as a Semi-Independent Church:

1. What about the payment required to leave the UMC? Can we afford it?

Our Annual Conference requires disaffiliating churches to pay two years of apportionments plus an amount calculated as the church's share of the underfunded pastors' pensions. Because Bethany has fully paid its 2022 apportionments and accrued our 2023 apportionments, we would pay one extra year of apportionments plus the underfunded pension amount. Our last estimate of that amount is \$470,000.

We do have these funds, but writing a check for this amount would be painful. In the long run, however, becoming independent is the best financial option for Bethany because we would avoid all future annual apportionments. Our 2023 UMC apportionments are \$189,000, and over the last five years our annual apportionments have averaged over \$200,000. The opportunity to pay \$470,000 one time to avoid all annual future apportionments makes good sense financially.

2. What about pastoral accountability? Can we effectively manage our pastors if we were to become semi-independent?

If we were starting a new church from scratch, there would be more need for external help. However, with the established structure and processes we have in place, including the Administrative Board, our Nominations Committee, and the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), we should be able to recruit, manage, and guide our pastors well. In addition, our lay leadership would have the authority to hire and fire our pastors; we would not have our pastors appointed or removed by the UMC Bishop.

3. What about our property? If we leave the UMC, can we keep our church campus and buildings?

Yes, the UMC has developed a process for disaffiliating churches to keep their property. That process expires at the end of 2023.

Currently, Bethany owns our property in trust for the benefit of the overall UMC denomination. Therefore, Bethany's rights in our property are limited. If we were to leave the UMC, we would own the property outright, without any denominational limits or restrictions. None of the options seriously considered by our church's leadership have property restrictions similar to the UMC.