



**Peninsula-Delaware Conference**  
**Baltimore-Washington Conference**  
The United Methodist Church

[PDCBWC.ORG](http://PDCBWC.ORG)



# BEGINNING AGAIN

A GUIDE FOR REMAINING IN  
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THANK YOU, FLORIDA AND WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA ANNUAL  
CONFERENCES, FOR ORIGINATING THIS DOCUMENT.

# The Purpose Of This Handbook

It is said that every morning Francis of Assisi would face the rising sun, raise his hands and exclaim, "Today I begin with God." He reflected the spirit of followers of Christ, who are always ahead of us ([Matthew 13:52](#)), leading us into new discoveries. That's why the image of the Christian life is a journey, not a destination. As Thomas Merton put it, we are "beginners all our days."<sup>1</sup>

In our day, Jesus is leading us into another new awakening. It is a pivotal time for the world and a time of renewal for the Church. A fresh wind of the Spirit is blowing, and God is calling us to raise our sails and journey in new ways and in new directions.<sup>2</sup>

This spirit of innovation is in our Wesleyan DNA. The early Methodist movement reached the marginalized, renewed the Church, and reformed the nation through fresh expressions of Christian faith. As United Methodists, we are heirs of this spirit.

But new awakenings do not occur without challenges. They are times of disorder, moving us from previous order to emerging reorder.<sup>3</sup> Theologically, Paul called it a new creation, made possible as old things pass away so that new things can come ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). He compared the experience of labor pains which precede Christ being formed on us ([Galatians 4:19](#)).

A new United Methodist Church is emerging. It is a new-wineskin expression of the Body of Christ ([Matthew 9:14-17](#)), a kingdom-of-God manifestation that brings forth treasures old and new ([Matthew 13:52](#)). In the words of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'A Charge to Keep,' the emerging UMC will respond to God's call "to serve the present age."

This guide is offered to help you remain United Methodist, and do so with purpose, meaning, and joy. It is intentionally in outline form, giving you enough information to act on, but leaving enough room to do so contextually and creatively. There is no one-size-fits all solution, but there are useful practices that can be applied to our unique situations. As you use this guide, feel free to contact Rev. Bill Brown at [bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org). You are not alone as you and your friends begin again.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, 'Contemplative Prayer' (Image Books, 1971), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Harper, 'Fresh Wind Blowing' (Cascade Books, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rohr, 'The Wisdom Pattern' (Franciscan Media, 2020).

# Table Of Contents

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What if My Church Disaffiliates? [Page 4](#)

---

What About My UMC Membership? [Page 5](#)

---

Beginning Again [Page 6](#)

---

Agenda for your “Beginning Again Meetings” [Page 7](#)

---

Gathering Options [Page 8](#)

---

Resources [Page 10](#)

---

Directory [Page 11](#)

---

Appendix [Page 12](#)

# What If My Church Disaffiliates?

Psalm 23:4 reminds us: “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff - they protect me.” As your church has wrestled with and decided to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, it may seem like you are walking through a dark valley. Fear not, God is with you and so are we. Although your church may choose to leave, you may choose to remain. Here are steps to take **before the vote is taken, when it is taken, and after it is taken.**

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## Pray

We invite you into a season of prayer. It almost goes without saying, but this is a time to rekindle our passion for prayer. As much as you're praying for wisdom and guidance for the church, remember to pray for all who are involved in the decision making process and for shalom to be experienced regardless of the outcome of the vote. Sincere prayer also really helps maintain spiritual health. Confessing sin and bitterness, and praying for each other, can do a lot to heal the wounds necessary to move forward in mission.

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## Throughout the Discernment Process

1. Designate someone to serve as the point of contact who communicates with those who want to remain United Methodist and the district office.
  2. Develop an initial email list of such folks, and grow it over time.
  3. Let your district superintendent (DS) know you are the point of contact for those who wish to remain United Methodist.
  4. Provide occasional email updates about what's happening to those who want to remain United Methodist.
  5. Ensure all options are accurately and fairly presented in church-wide gatherings and individual conversations.
  6. Dispel rumors and untruths with facts.
  7. Do what you can to resist disaffiliation with a good spirit ([Ephesians 4:13](#)).
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## When the Vote is Taken

1. Show up and vote at the meeting so that the record shows how many want to remain United Methodist.
  2. Designate someone to cogently make the case for remaining.
  3. If your church votes to disaffiliate, invite those who voted to remain United Methodist to contact the point person or the DS for information about possible next steps.
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## Soon After the Meeting

Point person should complete the following:

1. Add any new people from the meeting to the email list.
2. Send an email to announce the date, time and location for first “Beginning Again” gathering ([see page 6](#)). Copy your DS.

# What About My UMC Membership?

No matter what form your group takes, you will need to maintain your UMC membership. You should care for your membership before the Annual Conference officially approves the disaffiliation of your congregation at its annual meeting in June. You have a variety of ways to do this. Follow the path that is best for you. Here are suggestions.

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## 01

Transfer your membership to a local congregation of your choice that is remaining in the UMC. Find-A-Church ([UMC.org/Find-A-Church](http://UMC.org/Find-A-Church)) is an online directory where you can sort through United Methodist churches in your area.

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## 02

Transfer to a Lighthouse Congregation. Lighthouse Congregations are local churches that are equipped to welcome anyone whose church has closed or disaffiliated. These United Methodist faith communities will provide a welcoming place to belong during this time of grief and transition. See [appendix](#) for more details.

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## 03

If all other options are not viable, an individual may transfer their membership to the Annual Conference by sending their name, home address, and current church where membership resides (including address) to the Annual Conference Secretary:

Peninsula-Delaware Conference: Rev. Eric D. Warner- [confsecwarner@gmail.com](mailto:confsecwarner@gmail.com)

Baltimore-Washington Conference: Kevin Silberzahn - [bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org](mailto:bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org)

Your membership will be placed on a General Membership Roll until such time as you find a local United Methodist Church you wish to join. At that time your new pastor will request your membership from the Conference Secretary.

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If you need help navigating these options, please contact your DS or Rev. Bill Brown ([bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org)). Here's the bottom line: you will remain a member of The United Methodist Church as long as you are proactive. Follow the steps above and see that it happens before your Annual Conference meeting in June where members of disaffiliating churches are removed from United Methodist membership.

# Beginning Again

Even when a congregation votes to disaffiliate, it does not take effect immediately. You have time to conduct a series of Beginning Again gatherings. This section guides you as you do this.

Take some time to grieve. We realize there will be a sense of loss, especially if you have been with the church for a long time. Allow yourself and others, who choose to remain United Methodist, time to grieve and process your emotions. This can be a difficult and emotional time. It is important to feel your emotions and work through them in a healthy manner.

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There are two phases to Beginning Again: mourning and futuring. Keep the worship/work pattern going. As William Temple put it, “Worship is the central act of the people of God.” We do our work best as a response to God’s work in, among, and through us. Plan for worship that includes singing, praying, and encouraging devotionals rooted in Scripture and tradition. We find light and life at the nexus of the vertical (worship God) and horizontal (work together).

Also, at each gathering, be sure your email list is up-to-date. Effective communication is crucial in the Beginning Again journey.

## PART 1: MOURNING

If your church votes to disaffiliate, it will mean the loss of many things you have held dear. The challenge will be to move beyond the loss and commence the process of “beginning again.” Henri Nouwen described the challenge this way, “Every time there are losses there are choices to be made. You either choose to live your losses as passages to anger, blame, hatred, depression, and resentment, or you choose to let these losses be passages into something new, something wider, and deeper. The question is not how to avoid loss and make it not happen, but how to choose it as a passage, as an exodus to greater life and freedom.”<sup>4</sup>

The “Beginning Again” process is one rooted in the belief that “God is with us” and doing a new thing among us ([Isaiah 43:19](#)). With respect to The United Methodist Church, it is trusting that God is at work to make a new-wineskin to hold and pour out the wine of the Gospel. “Beginning Again” is your commitment to be part of the emerging United Methodist Church.

## PART 2: FUTURING

The next section of this book will guide you through subsequent Beginning Again gatherings. You will determine the number of times you need to gather, but the aim of these meetings is threefold: to discover your vision, to declare your intentions, and to develop your means for remaining in The United Methodist Church.<sup>5</sup>

As you begin this re-formation experience, have someone designated to record every response. Even if some are not immediately enacted, they may come back around later. Some groups write responses on a white board and take a picture of it to preserve the input. Capturing specific input is a way to demonstrate that every person’s ideas matter. Including pauses and quiet reflection also honors comments and gives them time to sink in.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Nouwen, ‘You Are the Beloved’ (Image Books, 2017), reading for November 9th.

<sup>5</sup> The threefold paradigm (vision, intention, means) is one designed by Richard Foster and the Renovaré ministry. It is the structure for the ‘Life With God Bible,’ (Harper, 2005), which you may find to be a useful resource.

# Agenda for Futuring Gatherings

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## Discover the Vision

The following questions will help you envision the kind of group you want to be.

1. What do you value in your faith?
2. How did your congregation help you strengthen and live those values?
3. What aspects of United Methodism are most meaningful to you?
4. How did your congregation help you strengthen and live those aspects?
5. What did you not find in your congregation that you had hoped to find?
6. What needs in your location are the most pressing right now?
7. Who are the unreached people in your location?
8. When you think of being a “loving fellowship,” what comes to mind?

## Declare Your Intentions

1. What priorities do you choose as you form your new group?  
Group them as:
  - life together (for the group)
  - life for others (for the community)
  - life for all (for the world)
2. Turn your priorities into a mission statement,  
“God being our helper, we intend to become a group that \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Develop Your Means

1. What form will our group take?<sup>6</sup>
2. Where shall we meet, when, and how often?
3. How shall we be present in our location?
4. What will we do to be connected to the emerging United Methodist Church?<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Options In the Resource Section

<sup>7</sup> Consult with your helpers to learn ways of being connected

# Gathering Options

In the futuring stage of the Beginning Again process, you are led to the point of deciding what kind of group/gathering you want to be. It can take many forms and your DS and Rev. Bill Brown ([bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org)) will work with you to discern the best options for your remaining congregation.

In the following content, you'll find a model for becoming an "Epworth Group." John Wesley said that his mother's kitchen in Epworth was "the cradle of Methodism," hence the name "Epworth Group" as you begin again.

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## Option 1

### Epworth Group (regardless of other options, everyone should begin as an Epworth Group)

- This option is best suited for a congregation that has 12-20 members remaining.
- The focus of Epworth Groups is twofold: (1) to hold together those whose church has disaffiliated (or closed), leaving them "homeless," and (2) to foster life together through spiritual formation in the Wesleyan tradition. The Resources section of this guide will help you discover materials to use in your gatherings. The gathering itself unfolds along these lines - with any adaptations you may design to make your group more meaningful.
  - 10 minutes: Welcome and opening prayer
  - 20 minutes: Book/Bible study
  - 20 minutes: Group discussion\*\*
  - 10 minutes: Closing, prayer, announcement of next gathering
- Group discussion should take place in the way that's best for the group. It is important to be clear that attentive listening is a form of participation; no one should be required or feel pressure to speak. Additionally, the group leader should "shepherd" the discussion so that no one (or a few) dominate the conversation. One way to do this is to respond to an overzealous speaker by saying, "It is clear this session is really important for you. That's great. But before we deal with this, let's see what others may want to share about what's important to them."
  - \*\*A possible discussion scenario—a cycle of questions that moves along this path:
    - What was "the big idea" you got from this session?
    - Why was it important for you to have that idea now?
    - How might you apply it to your life?
    - How might you express it for the good of someone else?



## Option 2

### **Begin as an Epworth Group and be yoked with an existing church as a circuit or cooperative parish**

- This option is available if you want to begin a partnership with an existing United Methodist Church but are not ready to commit to joining the particular congregation.
- Within The United Methodist Church, cooperative parishes enable congregations, church-related agencies, and pastors in a defined geographic area to develop relationships of trust and mutuality that result in coordinated church programs and ministry.
- This configuration will provide the group with pastoral care and a place for worship, if you so choose.

## Option 3

### **New Church Launch/Start or Fresh Expression**

- While a new church start is best suited if there is a core group from a congregation of at least 40 individuals, fresh expressions can happen with a group of any size.
- Since there are a variety of options for starting new congregations, please consult Rev. Bill Brown, Director of Innovative Evangelism, ([bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org)) if you feel this is your best option.

## Option 4

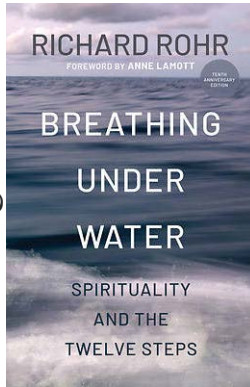
### **Join as an individual or group within a Lighthouse Congregation**

- Maybe you aren't ready to make a decision or need more time to grieve. Lighthouse Congregations seek to be a connecting space for those who find themselves displaced because of disaffiliation. Their mission is to provide care, a place to belong, and support to explore the next steps for those on this difficult journey. To find a Lighthouse Congregation or to learn more about remaining United Methodist, please contact your DS or Rev. Bill Brown.

# Resources

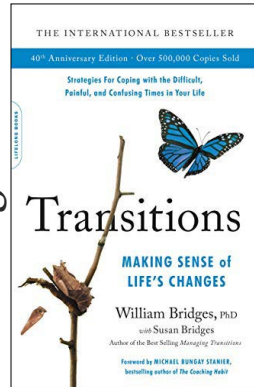
Once you have completed the Beginning Again process, you will want to continue meeting using resources that suit your mission. Because the emerging United Methodist Church is rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, begin with meetings that connect you with this tradition.

Mourning Phase



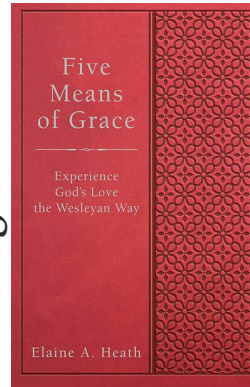
Richard Rohr, 'Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps'

Mourning Phase



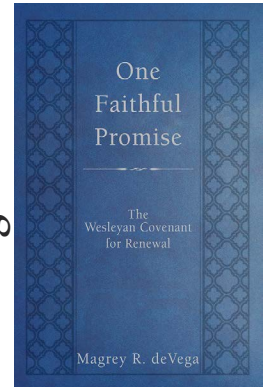
William Bridges & Susan Bridges, 'Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes'

Futuring Phase



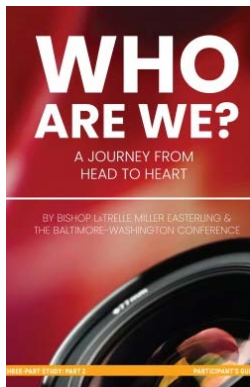
Elaine Heath, 'Five Means of Grace'

Futuring Phase



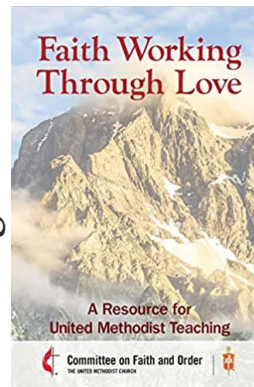
Magrey deVega, 'One Faithful Promise'

Futuring Phase



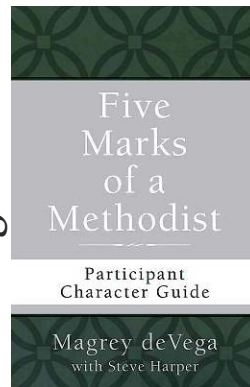
Who Are We? Part 2

Futuring Phase



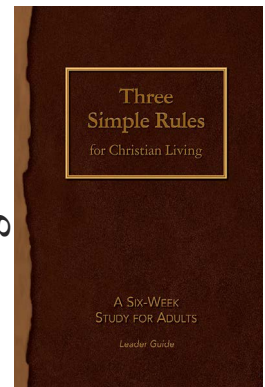
Faith Working through Love: A Resource for United Methodist Teaching by UMC Bishops

Futuring Phase



Steve Harper, 'Five Marks of a Methodist'

Futuring Phase



Rueben Job, 'Three Simple Rules'

When you have finished this study journey, you will be ready to proceed with additional resources from Amplify Media (<https://amplifymedia.com>). They have thousands of resources to choose from.

We also recommend resources available from 'The Upper Room' (<https://www.upperroom.org>) and from 'Renovaré' ([www.renovare.org](http://www.renovare.org)).

The Annual Conference Staff you have been in touch with throughout the Beginning Again experience will likely have other good resources to suggest. You can also use the Directory section of this guide to see what others have to offer.

# Directory

Throughout this guide the idea that “you are not alone” has been emphasized. It is true! The United Methodist Church is a connectional church. But it does not feel like it in the throes of disaffiliation. Below are contacts and ministries ready to walk with you as you remain in the United Methodist Church.

**Rev. Bill Brown**, Director of Innovative Evangelism. Bill oversees church development, church planting, the Fresh Expressions movement, etc. He can help guide you on your start-up effort as you navigate this new reality by remaining in the United Methodist Church after your congregation has disaffiliated. He can be reached at [bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org).

Your District Superintendent. This person has walked with you through the disaffiliation experience.

Continue turning to your DS for guidance.

(410) 290-7311 | [jgauthier@bwcumc.org](mailto:jgauthier@bwcumc.org)

## Delaware District

Rev. Joseph Archie III, *District Superintendent*

Andrea Lenker, *District AA*

(302) 655-8873 | [delawaredistrictumc@gmail.com](mailto:delawaredistrictumc@gmail.com)

## Lower Shore District

Rev. Christina Blake, *District Superintendent*

Sarah McCoy, *District AA*

(410) 749-3331 | [lowershore2021@gmail.com](mailto:lowershore2021@gmail.com)

## Upper Shore District

Rev. Elmer Davis Jr, *District Superintendent*

Crystal Wright, *District AA*

(443) 448-4012 | [uppershoredistrictoffice@pen-del.org](mailto:uppershoredistrictoffice@pen-del.org)

## Annapolis District

Rev. Sarah Schlieckert, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3445 | [sschlieckert@bwcumc.org](mailto:sschlieckert@bwcumc.org)

Willine Kamara, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3441 | [wkamara@bwcumc.org](mailto:wkamara@bwcumc.org)

## Baltimore Metro District

Rev. Wanda Duckett, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3435 | [wduckett@bwcumc.org](mailto:wduckett@bwcumc.org)

Christine Taylor, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3447 | [cdtaylor@bwcumc.org](mailto:cdtaylor@bwcumc.org)

## Baltimore Suburban District

Rev. Ann LaPrade, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3448 | [alaprade@bwcumc.org](mailto:alaprade@bwcumc.org)

John Gauthier, *District Administrator*

## Central Maryland District

Rev. Dawn M. Hand, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3434 | [dhand@bwcumc.org](mailto:dhand@bwcumc.org)

Sophie Amer, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3493 | [samer@bwcumc.org](mailto:samer@bwcumc.org)

## Cumberland-Hagerstown District

Rev. John Wunderlich III, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3442 | [jwunderlich@bwcumc.org](mailto:jwunderlich@bwcumc.org)

Kayla Harkcom, *District Administrator*

(301) 788-0016 | [kharkcom@bwcumc.org](mailto:kharkcom@bwcumc.org)

## Frederick District

Rev. Eliezer Valentín-Castañón, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3480 | [evcastanon@bwcumc.org](mailto:evcastanon@bwcumc.org)

Tonia Bennett, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3480 | [tbennett@bwcumc.org](mailto:tbennett@bwcumc.org)

## Greater Washington District

Rev. Gerard A. Green, Jr., *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3432 | [ggreen@bwcumc.org](mailto:ggreen@bwcumc.org)

Olivia Gross, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3443 | [ogross@bwcumc.org](mailto:ogross@bwcumc.org)

## Washington East District

Rev. Johnsie Cogman, *District Superintendent*

(410) 309-3472 | [jcogman@bwcumc.org](mailto:jcogman@bwcumc.org)

Joyce King, *District Administrator*

(410) 309-3439 | [jking@bwcumc.org](mailto:jking@bwcumc.org)

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**Support Ministries:** There are many of them, and others are arising. Here are website links to some of them:

The United Methodist Church  
([www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) AND [UMC.org/committed](http://UMC.org/committed))

BeUMC ([umc.org/beumc](http://umc.org/beumc))

Discipleship Ministries ([umcdiscipleship.org](http://umcdiscipleship.org))

Fresh Expressions UM  
(a subset of [Discipleship Ministries](http://Discipleship Ministries))

Resource UMC ([www.resourceumc.org](http://www.resourceumc.org))

# Appendix: Lighthouse Congregations

Lighthouse Congregations are local churches that are equipped to welcome anyone whose church has closed or disaffiliated. These United Methodist faith communities are a resting place with people who will care for you while providing a haven of peace and grace. Lighthouse Congregations will:

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**01** Provide a welcoming place to belong during this time of grief and transition, for as long as you need it. This includes a place with caring relationships, listening hearts, and unconditional love within a congregation that is confident it will not disaffiliate and commits to remain in the UMC. Lighthouse Congregations will provide all forms of pastoral and laity-driven care, which may include providing physical space for “Beginning Again” groups to gather as they consider what it looks like to stay together.

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**02** Offer ministry opportunities in which to engage – or not. There will be no pressure. Examples include:

- **Worship:** Providing worship opportunities whether online or in person. These services will be intentional about engaging and welcoming new people into their midst. They will also include the sacraments of communion and baptism.
  - **Discipleship:** Creating space to learn and grow, through small group gatherings, Bible studies, and prayer opportunities.
  - **Mission:** Inviting fellow United Methodists into opportunities to serve through hands-on ministries that involve making a difference and sharing the love of God with others.
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**03** Organize local Beginning Again groups by proactively finding and connecting with individual persons and groups that feel displaced by disaffiliating churches.

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**04** Connect persons or groups with Conference and District resources to help them discern their next steps as they consider a new church home.

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Whether you are an individual or a group of people who have become displaced or churchless because of closing or disaffiliation, Lighthouse Congregations will be there for you during this difficult time. As you begin again, specific pathways from which you may choose will continue to emerge as the Conference, Districts, and local churches come together to be The Connection at its best.

Lighthouse Congregations seek to be a connecting space for those who find themselves displaced because of disaffiliation. Their mission is to provide care, a place to belong, and tangible ways to explore the next steps for those on this difficult journey. To find a Lighthouse Congregation or to learn more about remaining United Methodist, please contact Rev. Bill Brown ([bbrown@bwcumc.org](mailto:bbrown@bwcumc.org)).

We love you. We care about you. We're here for you.