

Frequently Asked Questions

Why was Dr. Jody Ray re-appointed?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson unexpectedly and surprisingly informed Dr. Jody Ray and the Mt. Bethel UMC Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) on April 5 that he would be removed from his role as Senior Pastor at Mt. Bethel UMC for appointment to a then still-evolving assignment on the Conference staff related to racial reconciliation. The Bishop made it clear that Dr. Ray's options were to accept the move, take a leave of absence, or surrender his credentials. The Bishop's action was not consultation, but rather merely a notification that violates both the spirit and letter of the covenants that bind us together.

Are Bishops required to consult with pastors and churches before making appointments?

Our denomination wisely requires each bishop to consult with pastors and churches in advance regarding pastoral changes. But Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson did not consult with Mt. Bethel UMC. Rather, she surprisingly and abruptly just notified us of her decision to move our senior pastor.

What was done to appeal the decision made by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson to reappoint Dr. Jody Ray?

The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) initiated the proper process to appeal the re-appointment of Dr. Jody Ray. Mt. Bethel's 49-member administrative council informed the Bishop we are very happy to have Dr. Ray continue to serve as the senior pastor at our church, and therefore we are not in a position to receive or in need of any pastor she intends to send us. The vast majority of the Mt. Bethel congregation is completely supportive of this decision. To date, nearly 5,000 members and friends have signed a petition informing the Bishop we are pleased with Dr. Ray's service to this church, and we have no intention of receiving another pastor. Despite this, the Bishop remained insistent on Dr. Ray's removal.

Is the root of the conflict between Mt. Bethel and the Bishop over different views of LGBTQ people and their inclusion in the United Methodist (UM) Church?

No. It's about Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson failing to abide by our denomination's mandatory requirement regarding a bishop's good-faith effort to engage in robust consultation with our senior minister and our Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)

regarding pastoral moves. She simply notified us of the change after-the-fact, which was not a consultative process.

What is Mt. Bethel's stand on LGBTQ people?

We fully endorse the United Methodist Church's established position, ". . . that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God." While the United Methodist Church "does not condone the practice of homosexuality, and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. . . We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." We assume, as a bishop of the United Methodist Church, that Bishop Hauptert-Johnson endorses that position as well.

Why did Dr. Jody Ray relinquish his credentials as an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church?

When Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson informed Dr. Jody Ray of his re-appointment to a yet-to-be-determined Conference position, his options were to accept the move, take a leave of absence, or surrender his credentials. Both Dr. Ray and the Mt. Bethel UMC Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) have repeatedly expressed their desire to have Dr. Ray continue to pastor the church, but she is insistent on his move. Believing the Bishop undermined her credibility with the people of Mt. Bethel UMC and jeopardized the health and vitality of the congregation that is a beacon of hope and light in this community and beyond, Dr. Ray felt he had no other choice but to surrender his credentials.

Will Dr. Ray continue to be employed at Mt. Bethel UMC?

Yes! Though Dr. Ray surrendered his credentials as an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, he did not end his relationship with the members and staff of Mt. Bethel UMC. In fact, the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) immediately hired Dr. Ray as our chief executive officer and lead preacher, and we look forward to his continued service to our congregation and community.

Will Mt. Bethel UMC receive the pastor the Bishop has appointed to the church?

We have made it abundantly clear that the church is not in a position to receive a new pastor. We have an excellent pastoral staff that has been and continues to faithfully serve and lead Mt. Bethel UMC. There is no need for the Bishop to appoint another pastor. If a pastor arrives at the church, we will treat him or her kindly, but we will also let them know neither the people of Mt. Bethel UMC nor its staff will regard that pastor as the leader of

this church. We will not pay any pastor sent to the church by the Bishop under these circumstances.

What is the Mt. Bethel's current stand with the North Georgia Annual Conference and the Bishop?

As of Sunday, April 18, the Mt. Bethel Administrative Council voted unanimously to enter into the disaffiliation process and notified Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson of Mt. Bethel's intent.

How will Mt. Bethel disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church and when will that process be completed?

There is a clear provision in our denomination's governing rules that spells out the process for disaffiliation. We believe this process could be accomplished in a matter of months if the Bishop and the North Georgia Annual Conference are willing to enter into an amicable and orderly disaffiliation. The people of Mt. Bethel UMC simply want to continue serving in this great community and making our church a beacon of hope for all God's people.

How does this situation affect Mt. Bethel Christian Academy?

Enrollment is strong, and Mt. Bethel Christian Academy is excited for the 2021 - 2022 school year.

What should I expect on Sunday?

Mt. Bethel UMC remains committed to our mission to love and serve our neighbors here in Marietta, the greater Atlanta area, and around the world as Jesus would have us do. Under Dr. Ray's new role, as defined by the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), he will continue to preach and teach. We look forward to seeing how God continues to our church for His glory and to advance His Gospel!

How can I continue to stay up to date with the latest communications?

We will continue to provide updates electronically and through in-person meetings.

- To access the United Methodist Book of Discipline Online, [click here](#).
- To review Bishop Hauptert-Johnson's Welcoming Table Vision Guide, [click here](#).
- To watch the North Georgia Conference webinar and Q&A, [click here](#).