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439 Texas congregations granted approval to leave the United Methodist Church

Two regional conferences, based out of Lubbock and Houston, approved the departures, which will go into effect at the end of December.



A nativity scene set sits near White's Chapel United Methodist on Thursday in Southlake. The church has voted to leave the UMC, but has not yet been granted approval by its annual conference. (Shafkat Anowar / Staff Photographer)



By [Isabella Volmert](#)

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Two regional governing bodies of the United Methodist Church in Texas approved the departure of [all 439 churches that had requested to disaffiliate](#) from the denomination during separate special sessions Saturday.

The Texas Annual Conference, based in Houston, granted approval to 294 churches out of its nearly 600. The Northwest Texas Conference, based in Lubbock, approved the departure of 145 churches from the roughly 200 it encompasses.



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After a controversial stance against same-sex marriages and LGBTQ clergy members was upheld by a slim majority in 2019, congregations across the country are seeking to disaffiliate from the denomination.

Many conservative congregations are leaving the UMC, believing the 2019 decision has not been enforced. However, some churches deny leaving over LGBTQ inclusion and point to a variety of differences, from finances to theology.

The [UMC is allowing churches to leave the denomination](#) while retaining their properties and assets as long as certain steps are taken before the end of 2023, [under a ruling also approved in 2019](#).

Church congregations must first reach a two-thirds majority vote in favor before being approved by their annual conference or its regional governing body. Churches must also pay two years of apportionments to the UMC as well as any unfunded pension liability.

Apportionments are annual funds paid to the UMC by individual congregations. The amount is [decided by annual conferences](#).

Related: Why are some churches leaving — and others staying with — the United Methodist Church?

In Houston, 1,245 delegates from the 598 congregations voted on the mass departure, and 93% voted in favor. A spokesperson for the Texas Annual Conference, which covers much of East Texas, said 4% abstained and 3% voted against the departures.

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The Texas Annual Conference is the third-largest in the country.

Bishop Scott Jones said he wished the departing churches and the Texas Annual Conference the best at the conclusion of the [special session](#).

“This is a very difficult time, but I’m proud that our conference has handled this with grace, with mutual respect and with love,” he said.

Jones also concluded his time as bishop with his words. Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey will be the conference's new leader starting Jan. 1.

In Lubbock, the conference made up of 201 congregations approved a [report by the Board of Trustees](#) granting the 145 churches leave to disaffiliate.

Although the two conferences provided sweeping approval for the churches seeking to disaffiliate, this has not been the case everywhere in the [South Central Jurisdiction of the UMC](#).

The Arkansas Annual Conference controversially approved the disaffiliation of 35 churches while blocking three others in November, [UM News reported](#).

In September, 81 churches in the Central Texas Conference, which includes Fort Worth, were approved to disaffiliate in a special session. The conference currently has 185 congregations, and at least two more have voted to leave.

Encompassing the Dallas area is the [North Texas Conference](#), which includes 276 churches. While fifty-four churches have entered the process, only six have held a vote and reached the two-thirds threshold to leave. Ten others decided to remain with the UMC before going to a vote.

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