

Lewes's Groome Church disaffiliates from UMC

Issues around gay marriage and ordination prompted split

August 13, 2021



Groome Church, formerly Groome United Methodist Church, has announced its official disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**

Historic Groome Church, founded in 1904 and formerly Groome United Methodist Church, has announced its disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church.

Groome's exit was finalized in a disaffiliation agreement negotiated over a two-year period with the Peninsula Delaware Conference, the governing body of the UMC Northeastern Jurisdiction including the Wilmington (formerly Dover) District to which Groome belonged.

Groome's congregation voted unanimously July 23, 2020, to leave the Methodist denomination. This was the second vote taken over a 10-month period to register the congregation's dissatisfaction with UMC's stance regarding the fundamental rights of the LGBTQ community within the denomination. The congregation's votes were spurred by actions taken during UMC's 2019 General Conference prohibiting the marriage and ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals."

The decision to disaffiliate from the denomination was affirmed in December 2020 in a letter of intent from Groome to Pen-Del. Involved parties have been working since then to settle any remaining issues and obligations between them, and those issues are now resolved.

Commenting on the disaffiliation, the **Rev. Dr. S. Willard Crossan III**, Groome's pastor, said, "UMC has wrestled with this issue for 50 years, but has repeatedly failed to come to a meaningful resolution. The LGBTQ community is an important and vital part of the greater Lewes-Rehoboth community in which we live; its members are part of our daily life; they are our friends, neighbors, family members, the people we worship with, choose to love, to marry, to do business and play sports with. How can we reconcile the posture of the denomination with our conscience, the calling of our congregation, our ministry, and the commandment of love we believe to be the heart of the gospel? We can't."

Reflecting further on the significance of the church's exit from the denomination, Crossan added, "As the pastor, I see Groome's separation from United Methodism as an extraordinary opportunity to put into practice our congregation's long-held beliefs that diversity and inclusiveness are the hallmarks of God's plan for history."

The greater Lewes-Rehoboth area has one of the fastest-growing LGBTQ populations in the United States.

U.S. Methodist membership – 6,671,825 in 2018 – has been shrinking in recent years and is projected, at the current rate of decline, to fall below 6 million U.S. members by 2025. Worldwide membership is over 13,000,000 with membership in Africa, the Philippines and Europe now exceeding that of the U.S. The denomination got its start in the U.S. in 1784.

Crossan, a Wilmington native, came to Groome in July 2014. Prior to his appointment here, he served as pastor in Cecil County, Md., as well as at churches in Delmar, Cambridge and Chestertown. Crossan is a graduate of both the Divinity and Law schools of Vanderbilt University.

To learn more about Groome Church, go to groomechurchlewes.org.