



RUBEN SAENZ JR.
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THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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September 18, 2026

Church Leadership and Membership
Highland Park United Methodist Church
3300 Mockingbird Ln.
Dallas, Texas 75205

Members of Highland Park's Leadership and Membership:

I write to you personally, as your bishop and as a fellow Methodist Christian, at a difficult moment in the life of Highland Park United Methodist Church and the wider Conference. We are committed to listening to the Highland Park UMC members and other United Methodist Church members who have reached out to the Conference with questions and concerns about the lawsuit filed in August. The unresolved governance issues require the Conference to take action to protect the congregation and its United Methodist connection, and to ensure Highland Park UMC's members are aware of the 2022 changes to the governing documents. Even as the legal process continues, we will continue to work towards a resolution with Highland Park's leadership outside the courtroom if they are willing, and we remain committed to finding a path forward together. I write to ask you to receive a pastoral word and to consider that path with me.

The Conference continues to ask that Highland Park United Methodist Church restore the governance that was in force before November 2022. The specific restoration includes the reinstatement of "United" in the church's full legal name, the reinstatement of references to the *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* in the governing documents, and the restoration of members' participation in the governance and leadership of their church. These are not simply matters of corporate structure; they protect the voice of Highland Park's members in the decisions of its leadership and reflect the congregation's place within the wider United Methodist connection.

In November 2025, our respective counsel worked together to prepare revised governing documents and had reached areas of agreement before the December 9 meeting between the Conference and Highland Park UMC's leadership. Those revisions may provide a useful starting point for renewed discussion.

I make this request not as a matter of episcopal preference or institutional convenience. I make it because the covenants of order and accountability we share are part of what it means to be United Methodist. The restoration I am asking for is not a submission to authority; it is a return to the covenants Highland Park has long shared with thousands of other United Methodist congregations across our Conference and connection.

I understand that certain events of the past led many to question the future of The United Methodist Church. However, the Conference and Highland Park United Methodist Church have the opportunity to show, publicly, that as Methodists, we can envision a way out of dissension or disagreement and move forward in harmony by returning to the covenants that we hold in common as United Methodists.

Highland Park United Methodist Church has been a significant congregation in the Methodist family for many decades. Its pulpit has shaped ministers. Its members have blessed generations of Christians. Its outreach has served countless people in Dallas and beyond. The ministry of your congregation is not diminished by belonging to the ordered life of the connection. Rather, the ministry of your congregation has strengthened our Conference connection and has also drawn strength from that belonging.

Highland Park's leaders have stated publicly in recent weeks that a church of its size and complexity cannot operate effectively within the framework of the Book of Discipline. I believe there is room within United Methodist polity to address those concerns. Other large congregations have, with the cooperation of their Charge Conference and District Superintendent, developed organizational structures that reflect the complexity of their ministries while remaining within the connection. I invite Highland Park's leadership to work with the Conference to explore what that could look like for a congregation with Highland Park's distinctive needs and ministry.

I know none of this is simple. Our previous efforts to find a way forward have shown how deeply people care about Highland Park United Methodist Church and how difficult this moment has become. What I am asking is that Highland Park return to the covenants it entered into as a Methodist congregation more than a century ago and that have shaped its life and ministry ever since.

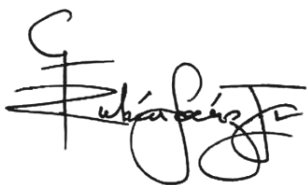
I have prayed about how to write this letter, and I have prayed about Highland Park and its people. My prayer is not that Highland Park United Methodist Church become a different church than it has been. In fact, my prayer is that Highland Park continues to be the church it has been for generations – a congregation of Methodist Christians, in covenant with the wider connection, offering the gospel to Dallas and to the world. The restoration I am asking for is offered in service of that continuing identity, not against it.

I recognize that this letter arrives at a time when institutional matters between Highland Park United Methodist Church and the Conference have been difficult. I am aware of the public statements that have been made. I do not write to relitigate those statements or to press on the wounds that have opened between us. I write because a pastoral door remains open, and I do not want the moment to pass without offering it. Whatever your response, know that I hold Highland Park in my prayers – its members, its clergy, its staff, and its lay leaders. I hold you in my prayers as you carry the weight of leadership in a difficult season. I hold the wider Conference in my prayers as we, together, seek the faithful path forward.

If, after receiving this letter, you would like to be in conversation with me, please reach out to my office.

My hope in writing to you is that we can walk this next stretch of the road together rather than apart. If that is not possible, we will continue to walk our respective paths with the pastoral warmth I have tried to hold throughout this season. But I offer this letter as an invitation to walk together, if you are willing.

Grace and peace to you in Christ, whose Church we all belong to, and whose ministry we together seek to serve,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruben Saenz Jr.", with a stylized, flowing script.

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Resident Bishop
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The United Methodist Church