



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Horizon Texas Annual Conference
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RUBEN SAENZ JR.
Resident Bishop

October 29, 2026

Not Crushed, Not Abandoned

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm writing to you, the faithful United Methodists of Highland Park, after a hard and painful weekend.

Many of you voted no. Many of you spoke up, met with your pastors and told your church's leaders, respectfully and clearly, that you disagreed with the direction they were taking. That took courage. You did it out of love for your church and for the covenant that has shaped it for more than a century. I'm deeply grateful for your faithfulness.

I know this has been painful. The church you love is more than a building or a place you attend on Sunday mornings. It is where you have worshiped, raised your children, celebrated life's joys and found comfort in times of sorrow. The relationships you have built and the faith you have shared there are deeply personal, making the uncertainty about your church's future especially painful.

Please hear me: You are not alone, and you do not have to carry this burden by yourselves.

I want to be clear about where things stand. A congregational vote does not, by itself, sever a local church's relationship with The United Methodist Church. Our Book of Discipline does not authorize a local church to unilaterally leave the denomination, and the temporary process that once allowed churches to disaffiliate ended in 2023. Highland Park United Methodist Church remains a United Methodist congregation and a charge of the Horizon Texas Conference.

My immediate concern is for you and your continued life together as a worshipping community. I do not want faithful United Methodists of Highland Park to go a single Sunday without a place to gather, worship God and share in the fellowship that has sustained you for generations.

For that reason, I have appointed the Rev. Andy Lewis as pastor of Highland Park United Methodist Church, and I have reappointed Rev. Matt Tuggle and Rev. Paul Rasmussen to other duties.

Andy is an ordained elder who knows our church and our polity deeply. As assistant to the bishop, first in the North Texas Conference and now in the Horizon Texas Conference, he has worked alongside me to help guide our conference, including bringing three conferences together into one. He is also a pastor at heart. He was the founding pastor of a church plant in McKinney, which cared for families displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and he later served as senior pastor of Holy Covenant UMC in Carrollton and First UMC Lewisville.

Andy knows how to gather people, build community where none seemed possible, and help a congregation find its life and mission. A native of Plano and a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and Perkins School of Theology, Andy and his wife, Sondra, have three children.

As your pastor, Andy will care for you, preach the Word, offer the sacraments and walk with you through this season. Working with your district superintendent, he will help ensure that Highland Park United Methodist Church continues its ministry as a congregation connected to the wider church, grounded in our shared covenant and guided by the Book of Discipline.

The Apostle Paul wrote to a church under great strain: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." (2 Corinthians 4:8–9)

Those words speak to this moment. Whatever uncertainty you face, you are not forsaken by God or by your conference. The church is more than the decisions of its leaders or the outcome of a vote. It is a community of people called together by Christ, bound by faith and committed to loving and serving one another.

We will not walk away from you. Our goal remains a vibrant United Methodist church at the corner of Hillcrest and Mockingbird: a congregation governed as a United Methodist church, connected to the wider church and open to all. We will keep pursuing that goal faithfully, patiently and through every proper path available to us. This is not the end of the story.

As we navigate the ongoing court proceedings and questions surrounding Highland Park's governance and property, we will gather for worship at University Park United Methodist Church. Its congregation and leadership have graciously offered us a welcoming place to worship together during this time. Out of respect for everyone involved, and to avoid unnecessary conflict while these matters are resolved, we will worship there temporarily as we continue caring for one another and moving forward together. I hope you will remain together as a community of faith. The relationships, ministries and shared commitments you have built over the years are worth preserving. Even in this uncertain season, you have an opportunity to carry that community forward.

Worship will begin on Sunday, Nov. 1, 2026, at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary at University Park United Methodist Church, 4024 Caruth Blvd, Immediately after the service, there will be a time for informal fellowship in the Fellowship Hall .

Andy will lead worship, and I hope many of you will be there. All are welcome. For more information about how to navigate UPUMC's campus, pre-register children or youth for nursery care or Sunday School, or worship online, please visit www.HPunitedmethodist.org.

For generations, the United Methodists of Highland Park have shown Dallas what our faith looks like: grace offered freely, care given generously, a connection to the whole body of Christ, and a welcome for everyone. Those gifts never belonged to a vote or a council. They live in you, and the church and the world need them now more than ever.

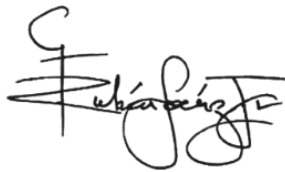
Paul also wrote, "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)

I won't give up on you, and I hope and pray you won't give up either. Keep praying. Keep worshiping. Keep serving. Keep loving your neighbors, including those who see this differently. Grief doesn't need to become bitterness, and our hope is still for reconciliation.

Please pray with me:

Faithful God, hold close the United Methodists of Highland Park. Comfort those who grieve, strengthen those who are weary, and gather those who feel scattered. Bless Andy as he shepherds your people. Give us steadfast hearts, gracious words and resolute faith. Guard us from bitterness and keep the door to reconciliation open. Lead us, in your time, to a United Methodist church on the corner of Hillcrest and Mockingbird where your love is proclaimed to all. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

With gratitude and hope,

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

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.
Horizon Texas Conference
The United Methodist Church