



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Horizon Texas Annual Conference
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RUBEN SAENZ JR.
Resident Bishop

October 29, 2026

To the lay leaders of Highland Park United Methodist Church, in care of Michelle Cox, Chief of Staff:

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

I write to you today with sorrow, recognizing that what I must say is firm and may be unwelcome. My office carries a sacred obligation – to the Discipline of our Church, to the members of Highland Park who trust that their church remains what it has always claimed to be, and to Christ, whom we all serve. I write in faithfulness to that obligation, praying that what follows will be received as truth spoken in love, as our tradition asks of all of us. The ecclesiastical determinations in this letter are the required results of actions taken by individuals at Highland Park United Methodist Church. These requirements are clearly set forth in our Book of Discipline and interpreted by the Judicial Council.

Statements made by church leaders in recent weeks indicate a belief that Highland Park United Methodist Church may unilaterally sever its connection with The United Methodist Church. I write to make it clear that such an action is not permissible under the Book of Discipline.

The Book of Discipline previously provided a limited process for local church disaffiliation under ¶ 2553. That provision expired December 31, 2023. There is currently no provision in the Discipline authorizing a local congregation to unilaterally disaffiliate, disassociate or sever its connection with The United Methodist Church. The Judicial Council has affirmed that the period for disaffiliation has ended and any substitute procedure used to sever the connection of a local church is in violation of the Book of Discipline.

As bishop of the Horizon Texas Conference, I formally make the ecclesiastical determination that Highland Park United Methodist Church remains a congregation of The United Methodist Church and that its Church Council has no authority to sever that relationship. A congregational vote or action of the Church Council cannot, by itself, terminate the congregation's connection to the denomination. Any such attempt is contrary to the Book of Discipline.

This determination is also consistent with Highland Park United Methodist Church's original governing documents. The Articles of Incorporation filed in 1998 expressly affirmed that the corporation would support the doctrine of The United Methodist Church and remain subject to and in conformity with its Book of Discipline. Under those Articles of Incorporation, the Church Council's powers and duties are

only those described by the Constitution and the Discipline. The original bylaws, adopted January 1, 1999, affirmed that same commitment.

I recognize and respect the right of every individual to make personal decisions regarding religious affiliation and worship. Nothing in this determination limits that freedom. As the Discipline itself affirms, “As we make disciples, we respect persons of all religious faiths and we defend religious freedom for all persons” (§ 121). Your faith is your own, and no one – least of all your bishop – would ask you to hold it insincerely. However, the right of individuals to choose their religious affiliation is distinct from the authority of a local church council to alter the denominational relationship of a United Methodist congregation.

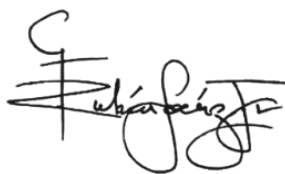
Our Book of Discipline describes the connectional covenant through which United Methodists support one another and share responsibility for faithful discipleship and mission. It also calls us to “full equity and accountability in our relationships, structures, and responsibilities for the denomination” (§ 125). As bishop, I am entrusted with upholding that covenant and the order of our Church, and I intend to honor that responsibility faithfully.

In accordance with my responsibilities as bishop, I have reappointed Rev. Matt Tuggle and Rev. Paul Rasmussen from their positions and appointed Rev. Andy Lewis to serve as Highland Park United Methodist Church’s senior pastor, effective October 29, 2026. Rev. Lewis is now the duly appointed senior pastor of Highland Park United Methodist Church, with the responsibility for its pastoral leadership and ministry in accordance with the Book of Discipline.

Highland Park United Methodist Church, chartered in 1916, remains a recognized United Methodist congregation and a charge of the Horizon Texas Conference. No action taken by its Church Council changes that ecclesiastical standing. The Conference will protect, to the fullest extent, the rights and benefits of the connection for Highland Park’s United Methodist members, ensuring that they continue to have a place within the life and ministry of our denomination.

I say all of this not as an adversary, but as your bishop, still hoping for an ending to this chapter that includes full restoration of our covenantal relationship. I remain committed to praying for each of you, for the whole of Highland Park United Methodist Church, and for a resolution that honors God, restores what has been broken, and allows this congregation to thrive for generations still to come.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruben Saenz Jr.", with a stylized initial "S" at the top left.

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