Lighthouse Congregations FAQ

Q: My church is disaffiliating. How do I find out which Lighthouse Congregations are near me?
A: We will make regular updates to www.ngumc.org/lighthouse, which will include the city, state, NGUMC district and website of each participating church as they join the movement.

Q: Which local churches are currently Lighthouse Congregations?
A: As of August 1, 2023, training is still underway, but numerous churches have committed and are eager to make a space for you. And more are inquiring, so please check back again!

Q: My church is disaffiliating, but I want to remain UMC. What’s next for me *right now*?
A: We see you, we love you, and we honor your desire to stay in connection during a season of disruption and “church hurt”. As disaffiliation votes take place around North Georgia and as the Lighthouse Congregations movement rolls out, here are a few ideas:

- Check out The Harbor UMC at www.theharborumc.com, an online faith community for anyone finding themselves without a church home—whether that's because of turmoil, timing, life changes, health challenges, or displacement. You can follow The Harbor’s social media links to view videos of past services, find out about upcoming worship, and to connect with The Harbor’s growing community.

- Consider a season of Sabbath—how might the upcoming summer weeks offer you rest or a reset? It's okay to step back from church attendance altogether for a time, breathe deeply, trust that God is with you, and consider, “How is it with my soul?” The Lighthouse Congregations movement and your siblings in Christ in North Georgia will be here for you when you are ready to return.
• Transfer your membership either to The Harbor UMC. You can continue as a United Methodist Church member even if your local congregation is departing. Contact our District Office for help with this.

• Follow the Lighthouse Congregations movement for the names and locations of churches which affirm they will remain UMC and which are intentionally planning and training to welcome people who are in search of a place to land, for just a little while or for longer.

Q: If I start attending a Lighthouse Congregation after my church votes, am I expected to join or give?
A: One of the core values of the Lighthouse Congregations movement is radical hospitality and care. Lighthouse Congregations will hold a clear understanding that you’ll not be expected to give or tithe, to lead, or to join the membership rolls. This is simply one way a Lighthouse Church will work to honor the time and space you may need to discern your next steps regarding church. Of course, if engaging in those forms of church involvement are meaningful to you and would contribute to your healing, we encourage you to meet with the pastor and discuss your hopes!

Q: What is the difference between The Harbor UMC and a Lighthouse Congregation?
A: The Harbor UMC is a United Methodist church congregation—just entirely online! The Harbor, pastored by Rev. Jessica Blackwood, collaborates with UMC pastors, worship leaders, and churches from across North Georgia to offer online worship, virtual small groups, and in person fellowship and missions opportunities. The Harbor also works closely with our Lighthouse Congregations to connect those looking for pastoral support and Christian community. You can find out more at theharborumc.com.

A Lighthouse Congregation is an existing United Methodist congregation committed to remaining UMC and devoted to Christian hospitality and to the welcome and care of people who've been displaced from their church homes by disruption, disaffiliation, or closure. An LHC designation gives a congregation a unifying missional focus of welcoming, caring for and discipling people who have been through crisis and/or carry church hurt.

Q: Do the Lighthouse Congregations have anything to do with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN)?
A: No. While both movements provide support and advocacy for those who have experienced crisis and church hurt, the goal and rationale for becoming a Lighthouse Congregation is different. The Reconciling Ministries Network is a global non-profit founded in 1988 working to
connect laity, congregations, church groups, and clergy whose mission is the full inclusion of LGBT+ people throughout the life and ministry of the church.

Lighthouse Congregations are simply local churches committed to remaining UMC and ministering to those who have been displaced from their church homes by disruption, disaffiliation, or closure. Churches and individuals within this movement are trained in offering radical hospitality and care to those affected by the ongoing season of disaffiliation and disruption. The Lighthouse Congregations movement began in early 2023 and is coordinated through the North Georgia Conference as well as several other United Methodist conferences in the US.

Q: I think a group of us from my local church would like to remain together after the disaffiliation vote. How can the Lighthouse Congregations movement help us figure out next steps?
A: Lighthouse Congregations recognize that some of those affected by disaffiliation will have a nucleus of people from their church family with whom they want to stay connected. If you and a few of your neighbors, or your Sunday School class, or some other combination of folks would like to continue meeting together as you weather this season, please contact a nearby Lighthouse Congregation to find out more about the use of a room or room(s), sharing space, or other ways of finding a place to land together.

Think you might have a core group of people ready to continue UMC ministry in your local community? The Office of Congregational Excellence has resources to help you explore healing, stabilization, Fresh Expressions, relaunch, church plants, and more. Please reach out to Rev. Richard Hunter at richard.hunter@ngumc.net to start the conversation.

Q: I’ve also heard of “anchor churches”. What is the difference between a Lighthouse Congregation and an anchor church?
A: An Anchor Church is a designation given to a local UMC who is an essential, and perhaps even the sole remaining United Methodist witness in their community, town, or county. Furthermore, this congregation may have suffered disruption or decline, and would benefit from specific resources and support to help stabilize it and ensure its future ministry.

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