

## **Healing Disaffiliation/Separation-Related Trauma in United Methodist Churches Tentative Outline for Clergy and Lay Leader Involvement**

The cohort of community members that I am gathering for this research will consist of leaders from 3-5 United Methodist congregations in the southeastern United States. Each church will be represented in the cohort by the pastor (and associate pastor, if applicable and desired by the senior pastor) and by 1-2 lay leaders.

In gathering this cohort, I intend to meet one-on-one with the pastor(s) first to answer questions and address concerns related to participating in the project. If the pastors are then interested in joining the cohort, I would like to meet with the pastor(s) of each church along with the lay leaders that would be involved to answer questions and address concerns of the laity related to participating in the project. **(July-September 2024 timeframe)**

Once the cohort is set, I plan to gather it for approximately four 1-1.5-hour meetings. (If the cohort is comprised of all North Alabama Conference participants, at least one of the meetings will be in person and the others by Zoom. If the congregations are further afield, all meetings will be held on Zoom.)

- Meeting one will be for all cohort members to get to know one another and me, build trust, and set mutual expectations for our work together. **(September-October 2024 timeframe)**
- Meeting two will be an opportunity for each church in the cohort to present an artifact (an object that symbolizes congregational identity) that tells a “before and after” story: who were we before we began discussing disaffiliation? Who are we now that so many of our people have left? I will then facilitate group conversation around the artifacts. **(October-November 2024 timeframe)**
- Meeting three will be a feedback session in which I share aggregate themes from meeting two and from interviews (see below) so that I can check my understanding and so that cohort members can reshape the summary for increased accuracy as needed. **(November 2024-January 2025 timeframe)**
- Meeting four will consist of cohort discussion of themes and tools that emerged from discussion of the congregational artifacts, interviews, and scholarly research. I will then coach project participants to reflect on and consider whether/how to apply these pieces. Together we will work on a healing process cohort members can implement in their settings, and I will partner with the cohort members on next steps, resources, support, barriers to maneuver around, and accountability needed. **(January-February 2025 timeframe; an additional meeting can be scheduled to continue this work if needed)**
- Meeting five will be a debrief. When the cohort members took what they learned and designed to their congregations, what was the reaction? What was the buy-in? What was the initial outcome of healing measures? What worked well and what didn't? What can we all take away from the cohort's experiences that will be applicable not only in

members' settings but also beyond them? **(March-July 2025 timeframe, depending on when the cohort congregations implement their healing processes)**

In addition to the whole group meetings, prior to meeting three I will conduct interviews with the cohort representatives of each participating congregation about their specific experiences with disaffiliation conversations and their sense of what kind of healing is needed in their church. **(August-November 2024 timeframe)**

This outline is a tentative one, subject to change based on the needs of cohort participants and our group conversation and collaboration.

Confidentiality notice:

I will take notes at each meeting/interview and share those notes with participants for their additions and corrections. The records of this study, which will also include Zoom meeting recordings of cohort meetings and interviews, will be kept confidential. When I publish my findings, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or the people you discuss unless you (and they, if applicable) give specific, written consent. Hard-copy data will be kept in a locked drawer and shredded as soon as notes are transferred to online files, and password-protected Zoom meeting recordings will be deleted as soon as they have been transcribed to a digital file. All digital/online data will be kept in password-protected files. I alone will have access to hard copy and online data. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. Raw data will be retained until June 2026, my projected graduation date.

If you have questions about any aspect of this research project, contact Laura Stephens-Reed at [laura@laurastephensreed.com](mailto:laura@laurastephensreed.com).