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**Mt. Bethel Church Leaders File Counterclaim Urging North Georgia Annual Conference to ‘Let the Church Vote’
Civil Suit Asks Court to Uphold United Methodist Church (UMC) Process for ¶12553 Disaffiliation**

MARIETTA, Georgia, Oct. 8, 2021 – Mt. Bethel Church today filed its responsive counterclaim and third-party claim in the Superior Court of Cobb County against the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, its Trustees, Bishop, and District Superintendent (Regional UMC Administrators). The claim asks the Court to require that they permit Mt. Bethel to move forward with a vote to disaffiliate from the UMC as is afforded in the denomination’s Book of Discipline.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson of the North Georgia Conference (NGC) orchestrated a pastoral conflict with Mt. Bethel beginning in April 2021. In response, on April 14, 2021, Mt. Bethel’s Administrative Council voted to begin the disaffiliation process, which has yet to be scheduled by the NGC despite a deadline for its completion.

“If the Regional UMC Administrators really believe the rhetoric they have been spreading—that [Mt. Bethel’s] 50-member Administrative Council unanimous vote was a rogue take-over by a few local church leaders who do not in fact speak for the majority—then, LET THE CHURCH VOTE!,” reads the filing.

Mt. Bethel is a thriving 10,000-member congregation with substantial assets. In addition to blocking the disaffiliation voting process, the NGC has retaliated against the church by proclaiming a sham “closure” and take-over of the local church and its assets, based on the Regional UMC Administrators’ inaccurate and pejorative claim of ‘exigent circumstances.’

Mt. Bethel leadership sought to resolve the issues with the NGC via the processes outlined in the Book of Discipline as well as through civil and church-led mediations, but on Sept. 8, NGC’s Trustees filed a lawsuit against Mt. Bethel intended to punish the church and to intimidate other traditional United Methodist churches in the conference that might also be considering use of the disaffiliation process.

“Despite this action by the Regional UMC Administrators to punish Mt. Bethel, Mt. Bethel continues today to perform ministry in the name of Jesus Christ throughout Metro Atlanta and in places all over the world,” the filing states. “It is sadly ironic that the Regional UMC Administrators accuse Mt. Bethel of violating *unwritten* ‘conditions of disaffiliation’ while themselves violating the express text of the Book of Discipline disaffiliation procedure the General Conference adopted.”

Declaring the NGC is asserting ownership over property in a deliberate effort by the Regional UMC Administrators to dry up Mt. Bethel’s resources by deterring member contributions, Mt. Bethel is seeking immediate injunctive relief from the Cobb County Court.

About Mt. Bethel Church

Mt. Bethel Church has served the Marietta, Georgia community for more than 175 years and is currently the largest church in the North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. With two campuses and an academic k-12 ministry, the church is compelled to love like Christ so that their lives, their city, and the world will be transformed for the glory of God. For more information, visit mtbethel.org.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: To request a copy of Mt. Bethel’s counterclaim, contact press@mtbethel.org.

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