**GENERAL**

**What is spiritual discernment?**

There are a variety of ways to make decisions. In the church, sometimes spiritual discernment is used particularly during deep and challenging decision making. Spiritual discernment is setting oneself or the community apart for a time of deep listening for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, insight and calling. It is not judging others (Matthew 7:1-2), but encountering God’s wisdom and understanding in others, the community of faith and ourselves for discerning God’s calling for the congregation and each of us individually.

**What is needed for spiritual discernment?**

There are four things needed for spiritual discernment.

1. Creating time to listen deeply and contemplate.
2. Prayer, scripture reading and the words of Jesus to spiritually center and root oneself.
3. Openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
4. Holy conversation that listens to understand, responds with grace and respect for God and one another and recognizes that we are in conversation with one another and with God.

**What is our discernment process?**

Beginning July 10, 2022, during the Sunday School hour, we are gathering and educating ourselves through videos from our Bishop and from others who are speaking to the issues. On July 31, we will hand our cards for people to submit questions which will be answered by our clergy at a called Town Hall Meeting. Many of these Q & A’s will make their way on our website as well for others who may have the same question(s) later. We will enter a focused time (currently thinking 30 days) of prayer for people to consider all the information and ask additional questions. Following the 30 days of prayer we will call a Church Conference to vote whether Humble First Methodist will continue its affiliation with the UMC or affiliate with the GMC.

**Why now? Why the rush?**

At the Texas Annual Conference (TAC) in late May 2022, Bishop Scott Jones encouraged each congregation to consider its future affiliation by late fall of this year — whether that means: 1) remaining in The United Methodist Church; 2) staying in Wesleyan connection by affiliating with another Methodist denomination (Global Methodist, Free Methodist, etc.); or, 3) becoming an independent church.

In June 2022, Bishop Jones announced his retirement effective December 31, 2022, citing “*increasing disobedience and escalating conflict in the denomination*.” The new incoming bishop is expected to be much more progressive in theology and practice and will carry the authority to impose new exit fees that do not currently exist. Affiliation with the GMC would allow our local church to have more autonomy in the selection of pastors. Currently, FUMC is one of over 100 churches in the TAC in official discernment. This number is expected to double by year-end.

**Who made the recommendation for FUMC to enter a time of discernment?**

The lay-led Church Council made the decision to enter the official discernment process on July 5, 2022. The church membership votes on whether the church’s future affiliation.

**How and when will we vote?**

We will hold a called church conference on a date to be announced this fall. The District Superintendent will be present to preside at this meeting. You must be a professing member to vote. If you are unsure of your status, please call the church office to confirm. Upon arrival at the church conference, members will check in to receive a paper ballot.  Votes must be cast **in** **person** with no absentee or proxy voting allowed. The ballots will be counted by a neutral party and the decision will be announced.

**Is it legal, per the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, for FUMC to vote to affiliate with another denomination?**

Yes. Both the Book of Discipline and the Texas Annual Conference (TAC) have affirmed the ability to enter a time of discernment and vote future affiliation. Our District Superintendent supports our decision to enter the discernment process and has agreed to preside at our called church conference.

**What will change if FUMC leaves the UMC?**

Very little.

FUMC will continue to advance its mission to: *Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World;* and to do so by, *Building relationships with our neighbors as we grow Christ-centered families*. This remainsregardless of denominational affiliation.

FUMC’s clergy, Church Council, ministry partners and committed members are working to ensure the ministry and mission of the church advance without interruption or redirection.

**What are the options for exiting the UMC?**

There are currently three potential options for changing our affiliation: paragraph 2548.2 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, which is for “Transfer of a Congregation to Another Denomination”,  paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, which is for “Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality”, and a corporate exit where one would change our papers of incorporation but still with the intention of honoring our obligations to the Texas Annual Conference of the UMC.

Due to the ever-changing landscape of the UMC, we are unsure which method of exit we would use if the church votes to disaffiliate. Clarification on this issue will come after a pending ruling from the Judicial Council (the UMC Supreme Court) regarding paragraph 2548.2.

As of this writing paragraph 2548.2 is still under review and most expect it to be disallowed forcing churches the other two options. Note paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline has expires at the end of 2023.

**ABOUT THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH (GMC):** [www.globalmethodist.org](http://www.globalmethodist.org)

**What is the Global Methodist Church?**

The GMC is a new expression of Wesleyan beliefs. Launched on May 1st, 2022 the GMC will officially convene with its convening general conference in 2023. More questions about the GMC may be answered on their FAQ page:[**GMC FAQ**](https://globalmethodist.org/faqs/#1626100965871-8982ce83-f202)

**What are the primary differences between UMC and GMC?**

The primary differences between the UMC and GMC lie in their polity (the operational systems and governance of the church). There are no significant differences in the doctrine of the *current* UMC and the GMC. Specifically concerning the issue of human sexuality, the current written doctrine of the UMC and GMC are identical, but practices and theology regarding issues of sexuality widely differ among UMC clergy and laity.  The GMC is planning to uphold the written doctrine, while many in the UMC are seeking to make changes at the 2024 General Conference.

**How are clergy appointed in the GMC?**

Church councils work with the Presiding Elder and bishop to search for and place a qualified candidate. Churches may conduct their own search or may request candidates from the bishop.

**Could FUMC become a non-denominational church?**

Yes, but this is not a desirable option for both theological and practical reasons. Theologically a strong underpinning of our Wesleyan faith is in a spirit of connectionalism. Connectionalism has long been recognized as a distinctive attribute of Methodism. On the practical side, a non-denominational church would be responsible for providing healthcare and pension for clergy, rather than utilizing the networks created and supported by the denomination.

**If FUMC chooses to affiliate with GMC, when would the change be officially effective?**

January 1, 2023

A special called session of the Texas Annual Conference of the UMC will be held on December 3, 2022, for the purpose of voting to release local congregations that have completed the necessary steps and settled all financial and legal obligations to the TAC by that date.

**HUMAN SEXUALITY**

**Isn’t the division of the UMC over accepting LGBTQIA+ persons? The media says so…**

News media coverage often highlights UMC clergy and/or congregations that either advocate for or stand against full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons as clergy and as couples married in the church. At FUMC, discernment and decisions are primarily focused on the matters of scriptural authority (what orthodox Christianity has always believed about God, Jesus and the Bible) over matters of full inclusion.

Regarding this specific topic, FUMC relies on the Scriptures to guide all matters of human relations, including sexuality.

**What is FUMC’s current position on LGBTQIA+ clergy and marriage?**

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* has been the same on this matter since 1972, and yet it is disregarded by progressive clergy and congregations across the denomination with no accountability or enforcement:

Paragraph 304.3 of The Discipline says, “*The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.*”

FUMC has always followed The Book of Discipline and will continue to for as long as necessary, in adherence to the authority of Scripture regarding marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-5) and sexual practices outside of marriage (Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22).

FUMC stands with our bishop, Scott Jones, in condemning increasing defiance and disobedience against The Discipline.

**Are LGBTQIA+ persons welcome at FUMC?**

Absolutely Yes! FUMC views all people as individuals of sacred worth. Therefore, LGTBQIA+ persons are welcome and invited to participate in worship and ministry programs. We extend welcome, grace, and respect to all who call FUMC their church home and ALL people seeking a relationship with Christ.