

## FUMC's Discernment Process

This document provides a brief overview of a very complex situation; it is meant for anyone needing a relatively quick orientation to FUMC's decision to enter a Discernment Process. Please visit <https://firstmethodist.net>, look at the top of the page, right corner, and click "Discernment Info" to learn more.

### **Brief History re: decision to pursue discernment:**

- To determine if a church wants to stay or leave the UMC, a Discernment Process is required.
- Following a church-wide straw poll vote in which 67% of respondents desired to enter into discernment, the Church Council on November 7, 2022, voted to begin the discernment process.
- Our church then started 40 days of Prayer on November 21st that lasted through December 30, 2022.

### **What are the core issues that have caused UMC churches to pursue discernment:**

- Theological drift – The UMC has become increasingly accepting of clergy, including bishops, who misrepresent the authority of Scripture, leading to a wide variety of beliefs about core doctrine such as the divinity and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the necessity of Christ's atoning death on the cross for our sins, the mission of the church, and other essentials of historic Christian faith. Understandably, these theological disagreements have led to tremendous decline and dysfunction in the UMC denomination.
- While the issue over human sexuality is currently highlighted as the most visible point of difference; division within our denomination is a result of wider differences as stated above.
- There is greater theological diversity within congregations than some might expect; it is important to discuss and discern together as a church and decide where a congregation feels called to affiliate.
- There needs to be a central space for conversation, guarding against incomplete information and an inaccurate understanding of both sides of the issues at stake.
- It is *vital* for entire congregations to be involved in and be a part of this important discussion.
- Under current rules, there is a deadline approaching by which a church can vote to leave the UMC with its property. The deadline is December 31, 2023.

### **FUMC's Discernment Process Goals**

- Seek God's Will for FUMC
- Seek to operate from a place of trust rather than fear
- We are asking for God to guide us in what is best for FUMC
- Offer small group discussions and other events for all members to express their viewpoints
- We acknowledge differences within FUMC
- We pray that each person is acting with good intentions
- Openly consider potential pathways
- We will educate ourselves about possible options
- We will be honest about the uncertainties and challenges