

FUMC Frequently Asked Questions

Why did FUMC pursue Discernment in the first place?

Although there are many reasons, the most straightforward response is many members have questioned the vision for our church not aligning with the future vision of the United Methodist Church (UMC). Please see First Church website at <https://firstmethodist.net>, look at the top of the page, right corner, and click “Discernment Info.” Resources are available to help you explore some of these issues for yourself.

Other reasons include:

- **Theological drift** – The UMC has become increasingly accepting of clergy, including bishops, who denigrate 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 our denomination.
- **Ongoing conflict** over human sexuality in the UMC has cost millions of dollars and distracted the church from its mission of making disciples.
- **Future direction** – As many traditionally leaning United Methodist Churches and clergy are choosing to disaffiliate from the denomination, the well of orthodox pastors will eventually run dry leaving our church vulnerable to theological leadership in conflict with our stated beliefs.
- **Lack of Accountability** – Doctrinal borders under the Big Tent concept have been repeatedly crossed without recourse.
- **Guaranteed Appointments** – Ministers and elders are guaranteed an appointment no matter their teachings or ability. We have seen this at FUMC in the past with our church being almost destroyed.
- **Lifetime Bishops** - Bishops, once they are elected from the ordained clergy, are bishops forever in the UMC. Bishops have significant authority in the UMC and are the chief shepherds of each annual conference with the power to make appointments of clergy to serve in churches. If a bishop is ineffective or teaches beyond the big tent borders, there is little recourse since the bishop never has to face re-election.
- **Bishop Accountability** - Bishops CAN be brought up on charges. However, bishops are ultimately only accountable to other bishops within their jurisdiction (regional groupings of annual conferences). Bishops are not following through on chargeable offenses brought against others which the judicial council has already ruled on.
- **Theological Education** – lack of accountability within UMC and the type of education they receive means that theological diversity is being pushed far beyond the borders our big tent was ever meant to hold.

FUMC 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

What has happened since we began this process?

September 25, 2022	Town Hall meeting led by Pastor Scott.
September 26, 2022	Pastor Scott requested 30 days of prayer re: Discernment.
October 11, 2022	Bishop Schnase shared his message regarding state and future of UNC with gathering of FUMC.
October 18, 2022	Members of Bayith/Fellowship class sent church-wide letter comparing UMC with GMC.
October 24, 2022	Church Council sent letter to church members requesting (straw vote) on question of Discernment.
November 7, 2022	Church Council Meeting with vote to begin Discernment.
November 8, 2022	DS notified of vote and acknowledged discernment period of 11/08/22 to 05/08/23.
November 15, 2022	Pastor Scott sent letter to congregation with voting results to begin Discernment to Disaffiliate. First Listening session with DS announced. Steering committee formed.
November 21, 2022	Began 40 day "time of prayer" by FUMC congregation.
December 6, 2022	DS Ricky Sanderford meeting in first listening session with congregation as required by 2553.
January 12, 2023	Rev. Ryan Barnett spoke to congregation about the GMC.
February 5, 2023	Listening session 2 with DS Ricky Sanderford held at FUMC.
February 27, 2023	Steering committee meets with congregation for update on the discernment process and to answer congregation questions.
April 26, 2023	Scheduled 3 rd listening session with the DS.
May 10, 2023	Church Conference to vote on Disaffiliation from UMC and, if required, to vote on affiliation with GMC.

Is this Discernment just about Human Sexuality?

- The answer to that question is that Human Sexuality is a part of the entire vision as stated above. Divisions within the UMC are about much more than human sexuality.
- The GMC's position on human sexuality will remain the same as the UMC's position since its inception in 1968. As it always has, our congregation will continue to welcome LGBTQIA+ people into the fellowship of the church. Everyone is welcome to worship and participate in our ministries, regardless of belief or practice.
- The difference between the two positions is the policy in the GMC to not allow same sex marriages or practicing homosexual pastors. The same is true in the UMC Discipline but that discipline is not being enforced.

Why have we decided to explore disaffiliation now?

- Currently there is a process for disaffiliation in our Book of Discipline (governing policies for the United Methodist Church). This pathway out known as "Paragraph 2553" is only available through the end of 2023. Waiting until General Conference 2024 may mean that window of opportunity closes.
- Although the current pathway to disaffiliation appears to be costly, it seems likeliest that will only get more costly, and we feel our congregation is ready to find resolution sooner rather than later.
- By acting now, we feel we are being most responsible with the church's finances to fulfill our mission for generations to come.

How much will disaffiliation cost?

The Discernment Steering Committee is in the process of determining these costs. The process has not been clear and is requiring many inquiries. The Discernment Team is discussing this estimated cost with representatives from our conference.

Present costs are estimated at something under \$300,000 but the total cost is yet to be determined. The determined amount would have to be escrowed before the vote at general conference.

- The costs are broken down into the following categories:
 - Two Years of Apportionments - \$286,224.00.
 - We have already paid \$141,202.00 for 2022.
 - We have budgeted \$145,022.00 for 2023.
 - Unfunded Pension Liability – To be Determined.
 - This is currently a moving target which the committee is attempting to gather information. Disaffiliating churches must pay their fair share of that unfunded liability to ensure retired clergy are cared for.

How do we plan to pay the fees related to disaffiliation?

The steering committee has met with the Church Finance Committee to discuss costs related to disaffiliation. The finance committee is reserving \$300,000.00 to cover the estimated costs.

If we leave, will it hurt the UMC missions we love?

It has been raised that one negative consequence of disaffiliation will be less funding for mission partnerships we love within the UMC. We plan to continue being generous in our mission support and to remain in partnership with those missions we love.

Global Methodist Church

The steering Committee has chosen to recommend that the Church affiliate with the Global Methodist Church **if the congregation chooses to disaffiliate from the UMC**. Part of the UMC's Paragraph 2553 requires us to explore and have a plan developed for the future of our church.

Why did we choose to pursue affiliation with the GMC?

Although there are many reasons, the short answer is that the Global Methodist Church (GMC) represents the most hopeful vision that aligns with our preferred future.

Our leadership was particularly encouraged that this new denomination takes the best parts of our Methodist heritage, while correcting some of the governance and structural issues that have perpetuated dysfunction in the UMC.

Although there are many highlights about the GMC, here are some notable ones:

- Return to the **accountable discipleship** which the early Methodist movement embodied and that we are implementing already in our church.
- Smaller, more fluid structure with an **emphasis on the ministry of the local church** rather than boards and agencies.
- **No trust clause** – We would own our property and assets and, if desired, could leave the GMC at any time with no penalty.
- **Lower apportionments** – With a leaner structure, more money can stay with the local church and go directly to mission.
- We will have a **seat at the table** in the formative years of a new worldwide Methodist movement that we hope bears great fruit for generations to come.

We encourage everyone to read more about the GMC at www.globalmethodist.org.

What is difference in apportionments between UMC and GMC?

FUMC currently pays approximately 15% of our income to the UMC on an annual basis. GMC has set a maximum annual apportionment of 6.5 % of annual income with a cap of \$150,000 regardless of income.

The Global Methodist Church general church level (i.e national level), the apportionment is noted a “connectional funding.” The “connectional funding” is 1.5% of the previous annual income reported but the church to the general church. The conference then assesses an apportionment amount of no greater than 5% based on the previous annual income that is reported. The total percentage maximum that could ever be charged combined between the general church and the conference is capped at 6.5% but the conference can determine to charge less than the anticipated 5%. The connectional funding to the general church is capped at 1.5% and could actually be less than this if determined by the General Conference.

More information on “connectional funding” is available at

<https://globalmethodist.org/connectional-funding-in-the-global-methodist-church/>

Who will own church property if we go with the GMC?

There is no Trust clause with the GMC. We would own our property and assets and, if desired, could leave the GMC at any time with no penalty.

Who is leading the Global Methodist Church?

Officially, the 17 member Transitional Leadership Council is leading the Global Methodist Church during its transitional phase. However, over a thousand people have had a role in giving shape to it and bringing it into existence. Clergy and lay people in Africa, Europe, Eurasia, the Philippines and the United States have sacrificially given of their time, talent, and resources to discern God’s will for the formation of the Global Methodist Church. During its transitional phase, the church will be governed by the *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline*. Ultimately, duly elected delegates to the Global Methodist Church’s convening General Conference will prayerfully seek God’s will for the church’s future. The convening General Conference will adopt a *Book of Doctrines and Discipline* to replace the transitional document.

What practical changes will joining GMC require of our church?

The short answer is that nothing about our local mission and ministry must change because of joining the GMC.

- We would have to drop the “United Methodist” name and logo.
- Local church structure in the GMC is essentially the same and uses the same language we are already familiar with in the UMC. However, there would be more flexibility in the GMC to restructure around our mission if our congregation sees fit to do so.
- The GMC has “connectional giving” (called “apportionments” in the UMC) to support our shared ministry beyond the local church. We anticipate that connectional giving to be about half of our current denominational obligations.

Why didn't we choose to become independent?

Although several churches disaffiliating from the UMC are choosing independence, our Discernment Team has always placed a high value on being connected with a denomination for missional reasons and accountability. Becoming independent was never a serious consideration of ours.

When will we vote on disaffiliation from UMC?

The vote cannot take place until the end of the Discernment process. The process is controlled by the District Superintendent, who will set the date and control the vote. The vote is now scheduled for May 10, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

- A church conference will be called when the DS sets that date and time. At that time all members present, will vote on whether to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. To pass, at least 2/3rds of our members **present** must vote to disaffiliate.
- If that vote passes, we will take a short break before inviting all members present to vote on whether to affiliate with the Global Methodists Church. To pass, a simple majority (50% + 1) of our members present must vote to affiliate.

Who can vote?

- Only professing members who are present on date of vote.
- Attenders who are not members are welcome at the meeting but will not be eligible to vote.
- We are sorry, but the UMC will not allow absentee voting.

What happens to our pastor and staff if we join GMC?

If our congregation votes to disaffiliate from the UMC, our appointed pastor and church staff would each have to decide their own next steps. No one would be asked to leave. The stated policy of the GMC is to keep the appointed pastor and church together in such a transfer, unless they prefer otherwise.

How will clergy be appointed if we become GMC?

Local churches will have a greater say in who their pastor will be. The process of consultation is mandatory in every annual conference. This includes collaborating with the pastor-parish committee of the local church.

During Rev. Barnett's presentation, he discussed sending up to 3 candidates, with the church (SPRC) in consultation with each candidate and involved in making a decision. Noting that the candidate also has a choice. If there were no agreement, then the GM would offer additional candidates until a mutual agreement is reached.

When will the congregation receive more information?

- We invite any small group (Sunday school classes or others), who would like to know more about the process of discernment, to contact Gary Gammage garytom10@icloud.com or call (325) 763-4021 to schedule a meeting. We welcome your questions and concerns. We are also updating our "Discernment" tab on the FUMC website. You can access the website by going to <https://firstmethodist.net>, look at the top of the page, right corner, and click "Discernment Info."
- All members and attenders are invited to learn more at one of our two Informational Meetings. These meetings will include a presentation from our Discernment team on disaffiliation from the UMC and affiliation with the GMC, as well as time for questions and answers. The first meeting is currently scheduled for Sunday February 26th at 3:00 p.m.