



First United Methodist Church
Downtown Bentonville

June 8, 2026

Dear Church Family,

On Sunday, June 14, I will offer a State of the Church update during worship. I look forward to sharing good news about the health, growth, and generosity of our congregation, as well as the 2026–2027 budget recently approved by Church Council. I hope you will make plans to be present in person or online.

As we give thanks for the strength of our church, we also recognize that faithful stewardship calls us to ask important questions about the resources God has entrusted to us. One of those resources is the undeveloped land to the west of our campus, often called the green space. Over the coming months, we will begin a congregational discernment process about what, if anything, we should do with that land.

For some of us, conversations about church property bring memories of difficult moments in our congregation's past. I want you to know that we recognize that history and are intentionally designing this process to help us listen to one another with grace, transparency, and respect.

Throughout this process, we are committed to making information easily accessible to everyone. We will maintain a dedicated Land Discernment page on our church website where you will be able to find presentations, timelines, meeting schedules, recordings, feedback opportunities, and other resources related to this conversation. You will be able to access this page directly from a button on our home page, or through the navigation menu under "Giving," recognizing that this land is one of the resources God has entrusted us to steward faithfully.

I also know there is anxiety because local media have reported that we are discussing whether this land might help address the housing crisis in our area. And because our Affordable Housing Working Group has helped organize the early stages of this process, some may wonder whether a decision has already been made.

I want to be very clear: no decision has been made.

Affordable housing is one possibility we will learn about and discuss, but it is not the only possibility. Our task is not to defend a predetermined plan. Our task is to listen carefully, learn together, pray together, and discern together what faithfulness requires of us in this season.

As outlined in the Land Discernment Covenant endorsed by Church Council, we will follow a deliberate process designed to help us listen, learn, and discern together. The covenant itself will be made available to the congregation beginning Sunday, June 14, and will also be posted on the Land Discernment page of our website. In that covenant we spell out that we will be considering four faithful possibilities:

Option A — Sell & Invest. Sell the land at market value and invest the proceeds in a reserve or endowment to strengthen our long-term stability.

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Option B — Church-Led Capital Development. Launch a capital campaign to build on the land while retaining full ownership and control. This could include some combination of expanded pantry space, a parsonage, church/community/retail space, and affordable housing.

Option C — Mixed-Use Partnership. Enter a ground lease or partnership for development that could include some combination of expanded pantry space, a parsonage, church/community/retail space, and affordable housing, while the church retains full or partial ownership/control of the land.

Option D — Do Nothing for Now. After evaluating options and listening together, we may discern that this is not the right time to act and choose to pause, with the possibility of revisiting the land in the future.

Each of these options has gifts. Each has costs. Each deserves honest consideration.

The first step in the congregational process will be a series of **Land Learning Lunches**. These lunches will give us a shared foundation of information about the pressures facing our church, the pressures facing our community, and the values that will guide our discernment.

The Land Learning Lunches will be held after worship, with the presentation beginning at **12:30 p.m.**, on:

Sunday, June 14

Sunday, June 28

Sunday, July 12

Each lunch will cover the same information, so you only need to attend one. We will also record one presentation and make it available for those who cannot attend.

Because there is a lot of information to share and we want to honor your time, these lunches will not include open discussion. However, there will be ways to submit written questions and comments at the lunches, as well as an online option for sharing feedback later.

After the lunches, we will move into small group conversations. Some of these will happen with existing Sunday school classes and groups, and we will also offer open small group gatherings for anyone who wants to attend. Those dates are:

Monday, July 13 — 6 p.m.

Wednesday, July 15 — 12 p.m.

Sunday, July 19 — 6 p.m.

Monday, July 20 — 12 p.m.

Monday, July 20 — 6 p.m.

Sunday, August 16 — 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 20 — 6 p.m.

We will provide an online sign-up, but you may also call the church office and we will help you get connected to a conversation.

In addition, we will host a **panel of development experts on Wednesday, August 19, at 6 p.m.** This will be an opportunity to learn more about what is possible, what is complicated, and what questions we should be asking before any decision is made.

Throughout this process, we are committed to transparency, prayer, and careful listening. We will share information openly. We will create multiple ways for people to participate. We will not allow urgency, fear, outside pressure, or the loudest voices in the room to determine the outcome. And we will remain open to the Holy Spirit, who often helps us see possibilities we could not see on our own.

I am asking you to enter this season with courage, humility, and love for one another. You do not need to have your mind made up. In fact, I hope most of us begin this process with questions. Questions are welcome. Concerns are welcome. Hopes are welcome. I encourage you to stay engaged throughout the process by attending a Learning Lunch, participating in a small group conversation, reviewing the materials posted online, and sharing your thoughts through the feedback opportunities that will be provided. The more voices we hear, the better we will be able to discern God's direction together. What we ask of one another is that we bring those questions, concerns, and hopes in a spirit of trust, generosity, and prayer.

God has been faithful to this congregation for generations. I believe God will be faithful to us in this season as well. I am also excited about the potential that is before us to make a decision that will likely impact generations to come.

With gratitude for you and hope for what God will reveal among us,

Rev. Dr. Michelle J. Morris
Lead Pastor