



May 10, 2023

Dear Central Family!

The Central UMC Discernment Committee wishes to update you on our work and to share our plans, so the congregation understands the discernment process. Our charge as a committee is to prayerfully discern, in a timely manner, if we as a congregation have sufficient interest to explore the process of disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. We are ultimately tasked with making a recommendation to the Administrative Council.

The United Methodist Church has traditionally been a Big Tent denomination with a wide range of theological positions and social commitments. But the divisions in the UMC have grown deeper and more visible over the past decade, much like the cultural and political divisions in our society. Our divisions are primarily with regards to human sexuality as it pertains to our ordained clergy. The Book of Discipline states the official position of the United Methodist Church: *“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.”* [¶ 304.3] We equally note that the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church affirm that *“all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God...We affirm that God’s grace is available to all.”* [¶ 161-H]

In recent years, certain factions in the UMC have expressed their disagreement with this “incompatibility clause”; two conferences have elected bishops who are living in same-sex marriages. To date, there have been no disciplinary actions taken in these cases. Within the past month, two United Methodist clergy in Mississippi officiated at the wedding of two non-binary individuals. Mississippi Bishop Sharma Lewis promptly initiated disciplinary action.

The United Methodist Church legally holds the title to all church property. The 2019 General Conference of the UMC adopted Paragraph 2553, which is the process for a congregation to officially disaffiliate from the UMC while retaining its property. Paragraph 2553 is limited to congregations who are not in agreement with the UMC official position on human sexuality. Two-thirds of a church’s members must vote to disaffiliate, and the Annual Conference must affirm the request. A disaffiliating church will then pay 2 year’s mission shares and meet any health insurance and pension fund obligations. Following the completion of these steps, the congregation is disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church. The congregation would then decide its future as a community of faith. It is the

current view of the Discernment Committee that any vote to disaffiliate must occur by October 25, 2023.

We know our members hold a variety of positions on human sexuality based on differing interpretations of Scripture. Some support the Book of Discipline's stance on human sexuality, while some desire more inclusiveness.

But we are united in this: we love this congregation. We have united with each other in taking holy communion, in sharing joys and sorrows, in raising children, in celebrating baptisms, confirmations, and marriages, and mourning the loss of loved ones. We agree we must be united to continue the work of God's kingdom.

This is what the Discernment Committee plans:

May 2023: We will distribute information via [www.cumcmdn.org/discernment](http://www.cumcmdn.org/discernment) and we will also respond to congregational questions through a Frequently-Asked-Questions service. Questions may be emailed to [centralumcdiscernment@gmail.com](mailto:centralumcdiscernment@gmail.com).

June 2023: We will distribute a multi-question survey about disaffiliation from the UMC. This survey will include a straw vote. This vote will be non-binding, but it will give us an indication regarding the desire of the congregation going forward.

July/August 2023: We will hold a series of informational meetings if the Discernment Committee feels there is sufficient interest in disaffiliation.

September 2023: We plan to make a recommendation to the Administrative Council; they will either affirm or reject our recommendation.

In the event that a vote to disaffiliate is called, District Superintendent Dayna Goff will preside over this vote of the membership.

Please continue to pray for Central in this season of discernment.

In Christ,

The Discernment Committee

Jon Byrd, Co-Chair

Ronnie Walton, Co-Chair

Tim Allred

John David Barr

Kim Beck

Phillip Busbee

Susan Ledbetter

Kendrick Prewitt

Brandon Pratt

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