



# Garber United Methodist Church

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Date: September 22, 2022

To: The Members and Family of Garber United Methodist Church

From: David A. Banks, Pastor

Re: The October 5, 2022, 6:30 p.m. Church Conference

Thank you for reading this letter in its entirety as it has important information regarding the upcoming, October 5, Church Conference. We will convene promptly at 6:30 p.m. in Morris Hall. Please arrive at least 45 minutes prior to the meeting as there is a registration process essential to the conduct of the Church Conference.

The Church Conference is a meeting of Garber Church's professing members under the presidency of our District Superintendent, Jon Strother. The purpose of this meeting is to decide whether or not to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church under the provisions of ¶ 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline. While we have not seen the ballot, it will likely use language from ¶ 2553 and the Conference's disaffiliation agreement reading something like this:

*For reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues –*

*Do you wish to to disaffiliate? Yes or No?*

Several have expressed disappointment with this possible language because there are other related issues and concerns. The debate regarding human sexuality has revealed many fissures in our United Methodist Church. However, the language on the ballot is decided by Conference leaders seeking to reflect ¶ 2553. The ballot may not be changed.

Only professing members of Garber United Methodist Church may vote and speak. Others who share in our congregational life are welcome to attend. However, if we need to make room for professing members to be within Morris Hall, we may request non-members move to an alternative room in which the meeting will be streamed.

As to who are professing members, the Book of Discipline says, "Becoming a professing member requires the answer of faith of the baptized person made visible in a service of profession of Christian faith and confirmation using the vows of the baptismal covenant." (¶ 216.1)

If in our congregation's 60+ years,

- you went through a membership process – you met with the pastor regarding membership, and/or you attended a membership preparation class, or you attended confirmation classes; and
  - you affirmed you are baptized, or you were baptized in a Garber Church service; and
  - you promised the seven membership vows during one of Garber Church's regular worship services;
- you are professing member. A few persons took these vows to become an affiliate or an associate member who chose, instead, to retain your professing membership in a former church.

It should go without saying, but I will. If you have joined another church, you may be receiving this because your new church did not notify us of your membership change. In good faith and integrity, you should not vote in the Church Conference of Garber Church. You should fully exercise your membership and its responsibilities in your present church.

Anyone with questions regarding your membership status may call Beth Hicks or me. We will review your membership record with you.

One of our members, Susan Gowans, has kindly agreed to call all church member households to invite and to remind you of the October 5 Church Conference. She will also seek to discern if you need assistance with transportation, and if you have need for the childcare provided that evening.

## **We anticipate a full parking lot.**

- If possible, please share rides.
- If you are physically mobile, please leave parking close to the Morris Hall entrance for those with mobility needs.
- If you park on the sanctuary side of our campus, our crossing guard will assist in stopping traffic.
- Our golf cart will run from the sanctuary parking lot to Morris Hall and back.



Leading to this evening, I encourage you to spend time in prayer and fasting and discernment. Read your Bibles. Attend worship. Pray for spiritual discernment. Pray for one another. Pray for our Superintendent, Jon Strother. I imagine this must a difficult and painful season for him as it is for us. Seek to be surrendered in your soul to God's will. Seek help not to see anyone with animosity in your heart. Seek power not to treat those with whom there is disagreement with disregard, unkindness, or vilification. If we are not fully Christlike to one another, we will have been unfaithful to our membership promises we made before God and the Church.

During the meeting, I expect Jon, our Superintendent, will speak or preach. It is likely he will open the floor for persons to speak either for or against disaffiliation. It is possible that no one will choose to speak, but if anyone does, please receive the speaker with love. By our Annual Conference rules, speeches ought not to be received with applause or rejected with jeering. Those actions add to the already painful division. Similarly, when the vote is taken and the result is announced, the room will be filled with a great array of emotion. Please do not clap and celebrate or allow yourself outbursts of disappointment and anger. Our relationships with sisters and brothers in Christ are at stake.

Regardless of the outcome, we must intend to go forward as the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. We must intend to embrace one another in love, and, in love, to grow in our discipleship together that we may faithfully continue the mission of Christ through Garber Church.

During these months, I participated in the panel presentations on March 13 and 27 and the Question / Answer session in the sanctuary during Sunday School on March 20. Among the 15 or so small group Q&A sessions, I was present in three. The Task Force has expressed a concern that I have not fully explained how I came to my position on disaffiliation. Previously I was adamantly opposed, but, although heartbroken, I now have a different opinion, and I am hopeful that this painful choice actually offers great hope for Garber Church. I have agreed to one last open meeting for me to answer two questions: "What changed my mind to support disaffiliation?" and "What does it mean to "love your neighbor" as Garber Church?" If this is helpful to you, please come to Morris Hall at 5:30 p.m. on October 2. Given the time, we will serve sandwiches at 5:30, and I will begin sharing at 6:00 p.m. We will have childcare available. This session will be live streamed.

As a final word regarding the October 5 Church Conference, consider this: how we respond to one another in the minutes and seconds immediately following the Church Conference are absolutely essential to the well-being of our lives together as Garber Church. Please consider how to love and to care for one another. Which ever direction the vote goes, there is reason for sorrow and a need to comfort one another with the comfort of Christ. If the vote results in one's preference, there is reason to comfort one another with the comfort of Christ. For all of my life, people have said, "A word to the wise is sufficient."

We hope to see you on Wednesday, October 5, for the 6:30 p.m. Church Conference.

May the Lord Himself bless you and keep you.

In Christ,



David A. Banks