

**Recommendation of the JUMC Discernment Team to the JUMC Church Council
March 20, 2023**

“Love God. Serve Others. Grow Together.”

**“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbringing.”
Romans 14:19**

The United Methodist Church continues to be in conflict over several issues. The most notable is the argument over full inclusion of our LGBTQ siblings in Christ (ordination of gay clergy and same sex weddings). Because of this, a number of churches across the denomination have taken congregational votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. Their intent is to either join the newly founded “traditionalist” Global Methodist Church or remain independent. To make this separation requires the fulfillment of several administrative matters and financial obligations, and a congregational vote that exceeds the 2/3 threshold mandated to disaffiliate.

Several members of JUMC have had serious concerns about these controversies and their application to our church. They asked our ministerial staff and church leaders to consider if JUMC should disaffiliate.

A Discernment Team, composed of the chairs of major church committees and organizations, lay leaders, and concerned lay persons was named. The Rev Dr. C.M. Worthy, former JUMC pastor and Western North Carolina Conference District Superintendent, was invited as a consultant. The committee met numerous times, read volumes of documents and position papers, listened to congregational concerns, and held four church-wide forums.

The first church-wide forum was held in July and featured Rev. Amy Coles, Assistant to Bishop Ken Carter of the Western North Carolina Conference. Rev. Coles spoke on the logistics of disaffiliation, the implications for the congregation, and the protocols for holding a disaffiliation vote. The second forum, held on October 23, featured Dr. Greene and Rev. Barnes sharing information about possible pathways forward. The third conference, held on January 8, featured Rev. Earl Bradshaw of Mount Pleasant UMC. The congregation of Mount Pleasant voted to disaffiliate. Rev. Bradshaw discussed the reason the congregation decided to enter the disaffiliation process and the reasons why he decided to surrender his credentials as a UM clergyman. The fourth forum, on February 19, featured Rev. Bev Copley, District Superintendent of the Northern Piedmont District. Rev. Copley discussed the advantages of remaining United Methodist and further clarified the process of disaffiliation.

After thorough discussion and prayerful consideration following each presentation, the Discernment Team met on February 27 to make a recommendation for JUMC’s future. Although the Discernment Team was not of one mind, the team unanimously recommended that JUMC remain United Methodist and not enter into the process of disaffiliation.

In order for JUMC to grow in to our mission statement - ***“Love God. Serve Others. Grow Together”*** – and to carry out what God wants for this congregation – and the Jamestown community - the team felt that proceeding with the process of disaffiliation, culminating in a church-wide vote, would be harmful and divisive.

For years, JUMC has been a church full of grace whose members work together – regardless of differences of opinion on certain issues – to fulfill our mission. Regardless of differences, we have a passion for Jesus’ teachings and His mandate to serve and love others. We cannot do this as a divided and splintered group. While it is important that we have an ongoing and open conversation about topics on which we disagree, we can still aim to work together and in harmony to fulfill our mission. To vote would be the antithesis of our mission statement.

John Wesley’s first “General Rule” of the “people called Methodists” is to “do no harm.” There is no doubt that JUMC has members on both sides of the current divide. The Discernment Team feels that a vote would only serve to increase that division and polarize the congregation. There could be irreparable division internally while in the end satisfying no one.

One of the great strengths of the United Methodist Church historically has been its ability to exist centered on the love of Jesus Christ while other elements of polity become secondary. As Wesley so accurately said, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we be of one heart, though we are not of the same opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.”

There is much work that Jamestown United Methodist Church still has to do!

“Love God. Serve Others. Grow Together.”

The Discernment Team respectfully and prayerfully recommends to the Church Council of Jamestown United Methodist Church that we remain United Methodist and not seek disaffiliation.

In Christ,

The Discernment Team