

**FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
JOHNSON CITY, TEXAS**

**REPORT TO CONGREGATION AND DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT
CONCERNING DISCERNMENT WHETHER TO DISAFFILIATE
FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH DENOMINATION
(August 16, 2023)**

I. Introduction

On March 28, 2023, the Administrative Council of the First United Methodist Church of Johnson City, Texas, voted 7-5 in favor of entering into a period of discernment to consider possible disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church denomination. By letter dated April 3, 2023, and as required by the Discerning Pathways document of the Rio Texas Conference, the church informed the Superintendent of the Hill Country District in writing of its intent to enter this period of discernment (Attachment A).

A Discernment Committee formed to guide the church through this process. Committee members are James Sultemeier, Sheryl Watt, Kip Thompson, Kathryn Rutherford, and Tom Walston. The committee held meetings open to all church members on April 18, May 22, June 12, July 18, and August 15, 2023. The committee also held an informational meeting for the congregation on Sunday, June 4, 2023. A handout from that meeting is Attachment B. Three required listening sessions will be facilitated by the District Superintendent on **Sunday, August 27, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. in the Activity Building** and dates to be determined in September and October.

Pursuant to the Discerning Pathways Guidelines, this report and assessment of the Discernment Committee is provided to the Congregation of FUMC Johnson City and to Rev. Ricky Sanderford, Superintendent of the Hill Country District.

II. Discussion

1. **Discernment period:** The discernment period officially began when the church notified the District Superintendent in writing, by letter dated April 3, 2023, of its desire to enter into a period of discernment. The period of discernment ends no earlier than six months after the District Superintendent was notified (October 10, 2023).
2. **Intentional time of prayer:** At both church services on April 2, 2023, the congregation was informed that the Administrative Council had voted to enter a period of discernment, and the congregation was requested to enter into an intentional time of prayer on this issue. The congregation was frequently reminded of this intentional time of prayer during church services and in the church's monthly newsletter.

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3. Assess the impact of a decision upon the church, community, and conference:

- **The Church:** Johnson City FUMC is a vibrant, active, mission-minded church. It is located in the city of Johnson City, in the heart of the Texas Hill Country, which is both a popular tourist destination and a desirable area for retirees. Johnson City is a small but growing community with a 2023 estimated population of 1,868. The city is located in Blanco County, which remains primarily rural, with a 2023 estimated population of 11,638. Johnson City is located within 50 miles of both the Austin and San Antonio metropolitan areas, and population growth in Johnson City and Blanco County is expected to continue and to accelerate in the future.

Our church began in 1889 as a Methodist Episcopal Church and has been in continuous operation as a Methodist church since that time (134 years). The church acquired property for its current location in 1896, and it became part of the United Methodist Church denomination in 1968, when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren merged.

Management and Staff: An Administrative Council oversees management of the church. The Council includes the Chairperson, Pastor, Lay Leader, Staff Parish Relations Chair, Finance Chair, Trustees Chair, church staff, and other committee chairpersons. The members of the Council are confirmed by the church members each year at the annual Church Conference.

Full-time paid church staff positions include the Pastor, Adult Ministries Coordinator (currently working part-time), and Youth Director (currently vacant); part-time paid staff positions include the Church Secretary, Children's Education Director, Treasurer, and Nursery Workers.

Membership and Attendance: As of June 30, 2023, Johnson City FUMC had 316 professing members. Many adult members are older and retired. However, the church also has a significant number of children and younger and middle-aged adult members who attend regularly.

The church has two worship services each Sunday: a contemporary service at 8:30 a.m. and a traditional service at 10:50 a.m. The contemporary service is streamed live on the internet. During 2022 average worship attendance (including online) was 130; through June 2023 average worship attendance has been 134.

Programs: The church has an active Sunday School program. Three adult Sunday School classes meet; two are primarily older adults and one is younger and middle-aged adults. The church also has an active Sunday School class for elementary-aged children. Our middle-school and high-school youth Sunday School program does not currently meet

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regularly. During 2022, average Sunday School attendance was 54; through June 2023 average Sunday School attendance has been 56.

In addition to worship services and Sunday School, our church provides extensive programming for members and the community, including:

- Confirmation classes
- Vacation Bible School
- Lunch-and-Learn Programs
- Weekly Dominoes games
- Senior-adult Exercise programs
- Moms-Connect program
- Women's Bible studies (one day-time, one evening)
- Evening religious studies
- Emmaus gatherings and reunion groups
- Monthly Bingo games
- Fat Tuesday Pancake Supper
- Last Supper reenactment program
- Children's Easter egg hunt
- Living Nativity Services.

These programs are well attended by church members and the community at-large.

Mission Service: Mission service is also important for our church life. We are fortunate to have a Wesley Nurse, which enhances our mission programming. Other mission activities include:

- Keep-in-Touch (church shepherds)
- Meals and visitation for shut-ins
- Nursing home visitation
- Teddy Bear ministry
- Benevolence services
- Back-to-School Fair (school supplies, vision screening, etc.)
- Back-to-School Luncheon for JCISD teachers and staff.
- Backpack supplemental nutrition program (during school year)
- Operation Christmas Child (Christmas shoebox gift packages)
- George Barnette Community Thanksgiving Dinner
- After-school Kids Club (elementary age)
- Flu-shot and Covid immunization
- Texas Wheelchair Ramp Project (construction team)
- Lenten Clothing Drive (with Seventh-Day-Adventists)
- Manos Juntas (Mexico supplies donations)
- Treats for Troops

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Members also participate in outside mission activities, including:

- Kairos prison ministry
- Mission de Candelilla trips to Mexico
- Home-in-a-Week
- UMCOR Early Response Team.

The church also makes its Activity Center available for non-profit groups such as Lions Club, Girl Scouts, Texas Agri-Life, and others. The Activity Center is also designated as a Red Cross emergency evacuation shelter.

Discernment: As noted, Johnson City FUMC entered a period of discernment concerning possible disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church denomination effective April 10, 2023. This has created considerable anxiety and unease among church members. Some members feel strongly that the church should disaffiliate; some feel strongly that the church should remain United Methodist; and some are uncertain how the church should proceed. Issues raised by members include:

- UMC human sexuality principles and policies, the primary issue
- Tradition and loyalty to the UMC
- How to proceed if disaffiliation occurs
- Church-property trust clause
- Payment for cost of disaffiliation
- Future UMC apportionment obligations
- How apportionments are used by UMC
- Continuing turmoil in the UMC over other social principles
- UMC governance
- Failure of some Bishops and Jurisdictions to enforce UMC human sexuality policies concerning ordination and marriage
- Other issues.

Impact on Church: It is anticipated that Johnson City FUMC will lose members after a decision is made, whether to remain UMC or to disaffiliate. Some members have indicated they will remain with the church regardless of the decision made. However, as noted, some members have strong feelings for or against disaffiliation and will likely leave based on the church's decision. If a decision to disaffiliate is made, the number of members who leave will also be affected by the decision how to proceed: as either an independent Methodist church or as an affiliate with another Methodist denomination. It is unknown the number of members who would leave.

A loss of members will have a negative impact on Johnson City FUMC. There will be a loss of Christian fellowship and support by separation of long-time friends, worshipers, and volunteer co-workers. If a significant loss of members occurs, it would also result in reduced financial resources, which would, in turn, result in reduced church staff, and programming.

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Financial Impact: To disaffiliate, Johnson City FUMC will be required to pay 12 months past apportionments, 12 months future apportionments, and the church's share of unfunded pension liabilities of the Rio Texas Conference. The exact cost is unknown, but it will likely range from \$100,000 to \$125,000. The Rio Texas Conference provided an estimated cost for March 2023 of \$106,025 (Attachment C). However, that amount will likely change, either up or down, depending on the amount of apportionments owed and fluctuations of the unfunded pension liability due to changes in market conditions.

For the full year of 2022, total donations to our church were \$390,589 (excluding receipts from Youth fundraisers). Therefore, payments due to the Rio Texas Conference for disaffiliation will equal about 25% to 32% of total donations for 2022. Additional costs will be incurred for new signage, stationary, and probably for legal or accounting services for re-incorporation, a property title search, obtaining a new 501(c)(3) designation, and other matters. Moreover, donations in early 2023 declined from 2022, although they recovered somewhat after an appeal by the church Lay Leader. In short, the monetary cost of disaffiliation will be significant. If the church does not disaffiliate, there is no monetary cost except continued payment of UMC apportionments as they come due.

- **The Community:** As discussed above, Johnson City FUMC provides numerous programs and mission services for the local community. A loss of human and financial resources will likely result in some reduction of these programs and services. The precise scope of the reduction is not known, but we believe our church will continue to provide most current programs and mission services to the community.
- **The Conference:** According to UMC Data, in 2020 the Rio Texas Conference had 348 churches, 106,177 professing members, and 29,207 average attendance. Based on this data, Johnson City FUMC's membership of 316 comprises less than 1/2 of 1% of the Rio Texas membership, and our average worship attendance of 134 is less than 1/2 of 1% of Rio Texas average attendance. In addition, the Johnson City FUMC apportionment formula is less than 1/2 of 1% for financial support to the Rio Texas Conference. Therefore, disaffiliation by Johnson City FUMC, standing alone, would have no meaningful impact on the Rio Texas Conference. However, we are aware that, to date, 67 other churches have completed disaffiliation from the Rio Texas conference, and numerous others will likely disaffiliate in the future. The combined effect of the total church disaffiliations will have a significant impact on the Rio Texas Conference membership and financial resources.

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4. How the church will deal with practical concerns including, but not limited to:

- **The incorporation or reincorporation of the church:**

Since January 16, 1996, the church has been incorporated as a non-profit corporation, "First United Methodist Church, Johnson City, Inc." (Attachment D) The corporate status remains valid and in effect. Article IV of the Articles of Incorporation provides:

"The purpose for which the corporation is organized is to maintain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church. The management and affairs of the corporation shall be vested in and governed by The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church as the same now exists or may hereafter be amended by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church."

Therefore, if disaffiliation from the UMC occurs, the church will need to dissolve this corporation and form a new non-profit corporation or proceed as a non-profit unincorporated association. If disaffiliation does not occur, no action is required.

- **How designated funds and endowed funds will be handled, including notification, or if required, obtaining the consent of donors:**

The church has no designated or endowed funds that require notification or consent of the donors.

- **The resolution of any unpaid loans:**

The church has no unpaid loans

- **The effect of the decision, if any, on any outstanding or pending grants for ministry.**

The church's Wesley Nurse is sponsored by Methodist Healthcare Ministries and the Hospital Corporation of America (HCA). Disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church would not affect this ministry, unless the church ceased to be a Methodist church.

- **The source and cost of future employee health insurance, workers compensation insurance, general liability and property insurance and suitable indemnification of the Rio Texas Conference for any past liabilities:**

Health Insurance: Currently, our church provides HealthFlex insurance coverage for the pastor and spouse (but not for other employees) through a group policy obtained through the Rio Texas Conference and Wespath. If the church does not disaffiliate from the UMC, this coverage will continue. Cost for this health insurance: 2022 - \$19,162; 2023 - \$22,140 (budgeted).

If the church disaffiliates, current coverage will cease on the effective date of disaffiliation. Three options for continuing health insurance coverage include:

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- 1) Under COBRA, the current pastor and spouse may continue the existing coverage through Rio Texas and Wespath for up to 18 months, but the pastor and spouse would be required to pay 100% of the premium.
- 2) If the church joined another denomination or group of churches that sponsors a Wespath HealthFlex plan, active coverage may continue for eligible clergy members and dependents. The cost of coverage would likely change because the cost is determined separately for each plan sponsor.
- 3) Provide the pastor an allowance to obtain health insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace under the Affordable Care Act.

Workers Compensation, General Liability, and Property Insurance: Workers compensation and employer liability insurance are currently provided by Church Mutual Insurance Company through the United Methodist Rio Texas Conference insurance policy. Cost of this insurance in 2022 – \$744; 2023 - \$900 (budgeted). If the church does not disaffiliate, this coverage will remain in place. If it does disaffiliate, the church will need to purchase its own policies for this coverage. It is anticipated that the cost would be comparable to current costs.

Property insurance is currently purchased by the church through Church Mutual Insurance Company. The cost in 2022 - \$13,712 for buildings and \$1,373 for vehicles = \$15,085 total; 2023 - \$15,000 for buildings, \$1,500 for vehicles = \$16,500 total (budgeted). This coverage would continue, whether or not the church disaffiliates.

- **The process for pastoral succession going forward, and the congregation's plans if the current pastor decides not to continue with the church:**

If the church elects to affiliate with the Global Methodist Church, our pastoral succession would follow the GMC procedures for assignment of clergy, which includes consultation with our church. The bishop or district superintendent would consult with the pastor-parish relations committee, taking into consideration the needs and mission of the church. Consultation is not committee selection or call of a pastor. The role of the pastor-parish relations committee in the process is advisory only. See the GMC Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline ¶¶ 509-511.

If the church elects to proceed as an independent Methodist church, we would recruit and hire our own pastor. Various websites and other services are available to assist with a pastor search. Proposed procedures and criteria for recruiting and hiring pastors are contained in section VIII of the Draft Doctrines and Governance for an independent Methodist Church, Attachment H.

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- **Continued participation in an employee or pastoral benefits plan, if any:**

Historically, our church has provided the pastor with employment benefits, but not other employees. The church has provided the following pastor employment benefits through the Rio Texas Conference and Wespeth:

- a) Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP) – death, disability, and survivor benefits;
- b) Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) – defined benefit retirement plan; and
- c) United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP) – a 403(b) defined contribution plan.

Total cost for these plans in 2022 - \$12,032; 2023 - \$11,442 (budgeted; UMPIP removed).

According to information provided by Wespeth, a church that disaffiliates from the UMC cannot continue participation in the current CRSP defined-benefit retirement program. Possible alternatives include:

- (1) Wespeth is authorized to administer benefit plans for churches that disaffiliate from the UMC and continue to share “common religious bonds and convictions” with the UMC. These are determined on a case-by-case basis. However, any such plan would not be a part of the UMC CRSP and would not provide the same benefits. As noted, the current CRSP is a defined-benefit plan, while any new plan would be a defined-contribution plan, similar to the current United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP). This would be true whether our church became independent or joined another Methodist denomination.
- (2) The church could establish a Simple IRA plan (for small employers) in which the church makes matching contributions to the employee’s contributions to an IRA, up to a specified limit. This is a fairly simple process. However, to be eligible, an employee must have worked for the church during two preceding calendar years. New employees would not be eligible until meeting that requirement.
- (3) Not provide pastoral or employee retirement benefits.

NOTE: For Social Security and Medicare purposes, all pastors are considered self-employed by federal regulation. This means the pastor must pay the full 15.3% self-employment tax (12.4% Social Security + 2.9% Medicare) on salary, housing, and other taxable income. In a normal employer-employee situation, the employer and employee each pay 7.65% (total 15.3%). In other words, our church does not pay any part of the Social Security and Medicare benefits for our pastor, but we do pay one-half the amount for other employees.

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5. **Develop and make available to the congregation and the District Superintendent a plan for either independent operation or affiliation with another denominational entity and include the theological tenets of the new entity, the governance structure, the missional goals, and anticipated costs:**

The Discernment Committee recommends that, in the event the church votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, our church should either: 1) proceed to affiliate with the Global Methodist Church, or 2) proceed as an independent Methodist church to allow time to further investigate and evaluate affiliation options.

A. **Global Methodist Church:** If FUMC Johnson City votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, one option is to proceed to affiliate with the Global Methodist Church (webpage [Global Methodist Church | Join Us | Make Disciples](#)).

Information and factors related to affiliating with the Global Methodist Church include:

- Worldwide denomination; approximately 3,000 churches have applied for membership as of July 2023.
- New denomination launched in May 2022. Not fully formed. Convening General Conference will likely occur in the fall or winter 2024.
- Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline: [What do Methodists Believe? | Learn More | Global Church \(globalmethodist.org\)](#) (Attachment E)
- Details of the church's Book of Discipline will be added at the Convening General Conference, expected in late 2024. Additions and changes may be significant.
- GMC has a catechism of 77 questions and answers that describe its orthodox beliefs: [Catechism-for-the-Global-Methodist-Church.2023052496.pdf](#) (globalmethodist.org). (Attachment F) GMC recommends, but does not currently require, the catechism process for membership. Local churches can make the catechism a requirement for membership.
- Hierarchical structure similar to UMC: local churches, districts, annual conferences, regional conferences, and General Conference.
- Enforcement from top organizational level; possible sanctions for members, pastors, superintendents, bishops, or removal of church from GMC.
- No trust clause; own property free and clear. However, a church must specify how its property will be disposed in the event of the church dissolves or ceases operation (this is required for most non-profits). ¶ 902.
- 6.5% maximum apportionments (estimate would be \$24,750 for 2023 at 6.5%).
- No group 501(c)(3) available at this time, but GMC has an attorney opinion letter stating that donations to local churches are tax exempt even without a 501(c)(3) designation. See this link: [Methodist Church | Learn More | Global Methodist Church FAQ](#). The opinion letter appears correct. See Attachment G.
- GMC is similar to, but different from, UMC theology, worship, denominational polity, etc.
- Bishop appoints pastor in consultation with local church. Pastors are not guaranteed church appointments.
- Connection with other churches
- Discernment for 90 days and majority vote of church members to disaffiliate from GMC.

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- Little GMC administrative structure in place for the first few years.
- Denominational service agencies will take time to establish.
- **Women pastors:** Women are included at all levels of ministry and leadership in the GMC, including pastors, bishops, etc. Paragraph 306 of the GMC Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline provides: “Therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or gender (defined throughout this Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline by a person’s immutable biological traits identified by or before birth). . . . Similarly, inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons who meet the requirements of our Book of Doctrines and Discipline in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place.” Currently, Leah Hidde-Gregory is the President Pro-Tem of the Mid-Texas Provisional Annual Conference and will likely become the Bishop of this conference after the Convening General Conference in 2024.
- **Member complaints:** Under GMC Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline, a lay-member can file a complaint against another lay-member for, among other things: “Promoting or engaging in doctrines or practices that are not in accord with those established by the Global Methodist Church”; or “Disobedience to the order and discipline of the Global Methodist Church.” Such a complaint would be referred to the District Superintendent. This seems unlikely to occur, but if it did occur, it could be disruptive and divisive to the church. See, ¶ 808.1 k & l.
- **Homosexuality:** no express statement concerning homosexuality as in current UMC Book of Discipline. Instead, GMC Book of Discipline states: “We believe that human sexuality is a gift of God that is to be affirmed as it is exercised within the legal and spiritual covenant of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman.” This indirectly but effectively disapproves practicing homosexuality or any other sexual activity outside a traditional marriage. ¶ 202 7. & 8.
- **Practicing homosexual pastor:** no statement expressly prohibiting ordination of a practicing homosexual person as in the current UMC Book of Discipline. However, ¶ 808 1.g provides that a clergy or bishop can be charged and tried for, among other things: “Engaging in sexual activities outside the bonds of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman” This would effectively prohibit a practicing homosexual pastor or bishop.
- **Same-sex marriage:** again, no statement in the Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline expressly prohibiting same-sex weddings in churches or prohibiting pastors from performing same-sex weddings, but the book contains numerous statements referring to “marriage between one man and one woman.”
- **Non-clergy employee lifestyle:** The book also provides that non-clergy employees shall not engage in any sexual activities outside of a heterosexual marriage: “As a part of our witness, individuals employed by the church shall subscribe to the doctrinal and moral standards of the Global Methodist Church and give evidence of the same in their life and ministry, including faithfulness in marriage, understood to be between one man and one woman, or chastity in singleness.” ¶ 704 5. (This paragraph specifically applies to employees of Transitional Connection Commissions, but presumably would also apply to local-church employees.)

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B. Independent Methodist Church: If our church disaffiliates from the UMC, another option is to not immediately affiliate with any group or organization. Instead, we would operate for a period of time as an independent Methodist church, while researching and evaluating potential affiliation with other Methodist groups. This would also provide time for newer Methodist organizations, such as the Global Methodist Church, the Methodist Collegiate Church, and possibly others to form and develop. As an independent Methodist church, we would keep the same Wesleyan theology, and our programs, worship services, and mission work would remain the same. The committee does not propose or foresee permanent independent operation, but we would take adequate time to fully explore the best affiliation for our church. To date, we are aware of seven churches that have disaffiliated from the Rio Texas Conference and are proceeding as independent churches: University–San Antonio, St. Andrews–San Antonio, Pleasanton, Medina, Utopia, Freyburg, and Bronte (some proceeding as independent Methodist, some as independent non-denominational).

Information and factors related to becoming an Independent Methodist Church include:

- Continues Methodist denomination – same Wesleyan theology.
- Time to investigate and evaluate the best long-term options.
- Time for newer groups to form and develop (Global, Methodist Collegiate, etc.).
- No trust clause. Own church property free and clear.
- No apportionments, compared to current UMC apportionments of \$38,316 and estimated GMC apportionments of \$24,750 (at 6.5%) (recoup disaffiliation costs).
- No apportionments - know where our money is being used.
- Will eventually want to get an IRS 501(c)(3) designation, but GMC attorney opinion letter states donations to local churches are tax exempt even without this designation. See this link: [Methodist Church | Learn More | Global Methodist Church FAQ](#). The opinion letter appears correct. See attachment F. Donations to our church would be tax deductible while we work on obtaining IRS 501(c)(3) designation.
- No interference from denominational leaders.
- No turmoil and drama over denominational doctrine and politics.
- Recruit and hire our own pastor.
- Determine employment benefits, insurance, etc.
- Need strong, consistent leadership to keep the church focused.
- Lack of connectivity with a denomination.
- Unfamiliar territory for our church. Will require investment of time, effort, money to establish and maintain.
- Prepare a Statement of Beliefs – Attachment H.
- Prepare a Governance structure – Attachment H.
- Develop membership requirements – Attachment H.
- Continues period of uncertainty.

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6. Develop a statement articulating their theological and missional foundations in seeking disaffiliation for reasons of conscience “related to human sexuality”:

We believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, our Lord. We believe that the Bible is God breathed and God inspired. Because the Bible is the Word of God, we obey the commands within it, as decreed by Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:16: All Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

We hold fast to the Book of Discipline; in regards to the disaffiliation process we cite paragraph 161 first and foremost:

“We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s Grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian Community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

While we desire to be in ministry with all and for all, we recognize that we do not have the authority to change the word of God. Rather, we must adhere to the truth of God’s Word and speak it in Love and Grace. We know that the some in the world do not agree with the Word of God and wish to chip away at the truths of God’s Word.

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out the ministry fully.

We hold fast to the truths of God’s Word and seek to use His Word to spread the incredible message of forgiveness, love, and grace offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We seek to share the Gospel and be the Hands and Feet of Christ.

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7. **A minimum of three listening sessions:** advertised to and open to the full professing membership, at least one of which is also advertised and open to those beyond professing membership, who participate in the ministries of the church/ministry setting. These sessions shall solicit the input of these constituents and shall be facilitated by the district superintendent or his designee. The sessions shall include a discussion of the theological and missional issues referenced above as well as the practical considerations set forth above. **The first session is scheduled August 27 at 5:30 p.m. in the Activity Building.** The remaining sessions will be held on dates to be determined in September and October.

8. **At the conclusion of this time of discernment, the church may request a church conference from the district superintendent:** With an affirmative 2/3 vote of the professing members present the Disaffiliation Agreement may be formulated in accordance with ¶2553. Please be aware of the following about the voting process: **If a vote is held, at least two-thirds (2/3) of the professing members of the church present at a church conference must vote to disaffiliate in order for disaffiliation to occur. You must be a professing member to vote. Professing members must be present at the church conference in order to vote; no absentee or proxy votes are allowed.** According to ¶ 215.2 of the Book of Discipline, professing membership is defined as follows: **“The professing membership of a local United Methodist church shall include all baptized people who have come into membership by profession of faith through appropriate services of the baptismal covenant in the ritual or by transfer from other churches.”** Contact Angie Bacon if you are uncertain about your membership status (830) 868-7414

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,

The Discernment Committee, Sheryl Watt, Kip Thompson,
James Sultemeier, Kathryn Rutherford, Tom Walston

