



First United Methodist Church of West Monroe
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Dear Friends,

Our church has entered a time of discernment as we make a decision on our future denomination affiliation. The decision is an important one for our church. Will we remain United Methodist or decide to go on a different path? A discernment process which includes congregational meetings and conversational groups has been approved. This informational packet has been compiled as part of the process.

During the month of February, we ask that each member take part in our process by:

- Participate in congregational meetings and/or conversational groups
- Educate yourself about the decision to be made
- Pray and fast (if you are able)

In making decisions regarding our future, it is important that we do our due diligence. We should pray for God's guidance. We should be informed. We will be able to have conversations and ask questions.

Our discernment plan is available on our church's website. You will also find other information such as Paragraph 2553 which is the governance that is allowing this conversation, information on the state of the UMC, the requirements for discernment as was given to us, a tool for answering the discussion questions that will be asked, and more.

Please join me in our discernment process as we decide on our future.

Sincerely

Karen Cupit
Church Council Chair

Reasons to Stay Affiliated with the UMC

FUMC-WM has been a UMC congregation since 1969. This is fifty-four (54) years of history.

The UMC is a "known commodity" to our members. Members of the church know the UMC structure, governance, and policies. Members may find security in these known areas.

FUMC-WM is known in our community as a UMC church. People are familiar with the denomination and its mission. The church logo – the cross and flame – is familiar to the general public.

There are benefits of a member of the UMC. One benefit is all UMC congregations will have a pastor appointed to serve them. There are no pastor search committees in the local church.

United Methodist Churches are connectional with both the churches in the same geographical area as well as world-wide.

Congregations are stakeholders in UMC properties and programs.

Staying in the congregation will not cost additional payments. The church will continue to pay its annual apportionments.

Reasons to Disaffiliate from the UMC

The congregation can move past the continued debate over human sexuality in the UMC.

The church can gain focus on its chosen ministries. The congregation can continue with current ministries and develop new ones moving forward.

The congregation can join a different denomination with beliefs similar to its own and how God is guiding it.

The congregation can join another denomination that has a vision, structure, governance, and policies that meet the church's direction.

Joining a new denomination will most likely have costs associated with it, but it is hoped that they will not exceed the amounts currently being paid in apportionments. The congregation may be better able to direct its monies to ministries it chooses.

Disaffiliating from the UMC at this time will allow us to be released from the current "trust clause". Efforts can be made so that the church would not enter into a new trust clause with future affiliations.

While the congregation would no longer be stakeholders in UMC properties and programs, most of these can be supported or used by non-UMC congregations.

Common Questions

What is Disaffiliation?

A vote for disaffiliation means we desire to leave the United Methodist Church. A vote against disaffiliation means we desire to stay in the United Methodist Church.

What is Discernment?

Discernment is defined as the ability to judge well. In Christian contests, it is the perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding.

What is FUMC-WM's discernment process?

A separate document has been prepared that discusses the process. The District Superintendent has approved this plan.

Why are we having Congregational Meetings and Conversational Groups?

We have to have an attendance of **65% of our congregation's reported 2019 average worship attendance** at the various church meetings. We want to have ample opportunities for our congregation to meet together.

Has the UMC's stance on homosexuality changed?

No, it has not. The Book of Discipline still contains the language "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching". The UMC continues to restrict homosexual clergy and weddings. Pastors may not be "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" and may not conduct same-sex weddings or unions.

If the UMC stance has not changed, why would we disaffiliate?

Over the years, there have been many votes taken to change the Book of Discipline, but they have failed. The next General Conference will be held in 2024. It has been speculated that changes may be approved at this General Conference.

The current method for disaffiliation will expire on December 31, 2023. Our Louisiana Conference will hold its annual meeting in June. Our congregation will have to make a decision regarding disaffiliation prior to this meeting to be included on the agenda.

When do we decide if there will be a vote taken regarding disaffiliation?

The Church Council will vote on whether or not to have a Church Conference where a vote will be taken. The Church Council meeting will be held after the discernment period.

If we decide to vote, who can vote?

Any professing member of the congregation who attends the Church Conference is eligible to vote. Votes will be cast in person. Votes by proxy or electronically are not accepted.

What is the voting threshold to disaffiliate?

At least two-thirds of the professing members who cast a vote at the Church Conference must vote in favor of disaffiliation for the matter to pass. There is no number to establish a quorum. The professing members of the Church that attend the Church Conference are eligible to vote.

What happens after the vote?

If the church votes NOT to disaffiliate, nothing happens.

If the church votes TO disaffiliate, the following will happen:

- The Trustees will begin the legal process of transferring assets into the name of the new church entity we create
- We will investigate the denominational opportunities that exist for our church.
- We will work to meet the requirements of the Louisiana Conference to be included on the agenda at the Annual Conference.

Regardless of the vote, we will continue to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

What are our exit costs if we choose to disaffiliate?

Our costs are \$178,239.

This amount would be due in May 2023.

How will we pay exit costs?

That decision will be need to be made. If the decision is made to disaffiliate, the church can investigate options including collecting special donations, bank loans, and other opportunities.

If we disaffiliate, where we go?

If the church votes to disaffiliate, the matter of where we go will be discussed. We do not consider that before deciding on disaffiliation.

There are various options available for the future:

Independent

Global Methodist Church

Evangelical Methodist Church

Free Methodist

and other Wesleyan/Methodist denominations