

Minimum Parameters for Medium/Large Church discernment processes.

The primary goals of this discernment process are:

- To invite and provide congregation-wide opportunities for church members to understand the “why” behind this call for discernment and engage God in personal and corporate times of prayerful discernment.
- Provide space for respectful, compassionate, informative conversations related to the congregation’s future with The United Methodist Church.
- To focus shared information on accurate, positive expressions of reality.
- To help inform the congregation’s leadership as decisions are being made regarding the congregations’ thoughts, opinions and impressions on remaining United Methodist.

The basic requirements of a local congregation’s discernment plan include:

- A standardization of an information packet provided to the congregation regarding remaining in the UMC. This shall include:
 - Balanced, multi-perspective, minimally biased, factual information.
 - Any information shared from any source may only include positive information about the respective institution, denomination or source providing the information. That is, any information shared from The United Methodist Church can only contain information about the UMC. It cannot degrade, devalue or describe any other denomination or stance. Likewise, information shared by/on any other denomination, its advocates or an individual antithetical to the UMC can only contain information about that denomination or stance. It cannot degrade, devalue or describe any other denomination or stance. For example, Denomination X, or anyone who advocates for it, or for a particular stance, can only say what is good and right about Denomination X, it may not present “what is wrong” with any other denomination or stance.
 - At any point, the congregation’s DS may be invited in to clarify murky information or, at their discretion, a DS may request to review the information packet before it is sent out. Note: I need to review all information packets before they are disseminated. TD
- A gathering of “conversation groups” designed for open, respectful conversations on the information packets provided to the congregation. The purpose of these conversations is to learn from one another, not debate any issue. The guideline of only speaking positively about one’s own thoughts and not speaking negatively about any others will be in place. These conversations shall:
 - Be facilitated by 2 members of a leadership/discernment team. One facilitator shall personally lean toward remaining with the UMC, while the other facilitator shall lean toward potentially leaving the UMC. The facilitators should be trained and skilled in presenting/facilitating minimally biased, compassionate, respectful conversation and should be skilled active listeners. Ideally, a 3rd member of a leadership/discernment team should be present to record key comments and impressions, though this may be accomplished by one of the facilitators.

- A minimum attendance number of unique individual church members equal to 65% of the congregations reported 2019 Average Worship Attendance should be targeted. (However, every member of the congregation should receive the information packet and should be invited to attend one of the conversation sessions) Those in attendance at the Information Meeting with the District Superintendent can be counted toward that target number.
- Conversation groups should be limited to 12-25 persons, except in cases where to do so would unnecessarily prolong the process to hit the 65% AWA target. Care should be taken in larger groups to manage those who tend to dominate conversations and to draw out those who are hesitant to speak in groups.
- In addition to any other conversation led by the facilitators these questions need to be asked:
 - What we would gain by no longer being a United Methodist Congregation?
 - What we would lose by no longer being a United Methodist Congregation?
 - How do you feel/what are your thoughts about being in a denomination where everyone believes exactly the same?
 - At this particular moment, what do you hear God saying to you about our congregation?
 - What signs would you look for to confirm for you that the congregation is on the right path?
- From the point of the beginning of the discernment process to the time of a church conference, if such is requested, members of the congregation's administrative bodies, discernment team, facilitators, pastors and staff must covenant to not engage in the speaking, sharing or disseminating, in any form, any information that speaks disparagingly of others, any denomination, or other perspective. This is not intended to prevent anyone of speaking their convictions, but rather limits that communication to what is positive about their supported denomination or perspective. Again, this covenant restricts individuals and bodies from saying "what is wrong" with any other denomination, person or perspective.
- After the appropriate number of conversation groups have been convened, the leadership/discernment team shall meet, review the recorder's notes and discern the next step forward.
- The Congregation's DS may require approval of the leadership/discernment team's plans before they are implemented. Note that failure to meet a DS's expectation of a discernment process may delay when that DS calls for a church conference.
- A commitment by all portions of the congregation, especially pastors, staff and leadership, to avoid "parking lot", secretive, or extra-process conversations that degrade, devalue, denigrate or disparage any person, perspective or denomination should be made.