

Dear FUMC Members,

As our Church is entering into a new season, with our new pastor, Jeff Tate and family, we are experiencing increased attendance with many families enjoying fellowship together on Wednesdays and Sundays. There is a new excitement for the Spirit driven by Pastor Jeff's sermon messages and we are starting to feel momentum towards our worship, especially driven by our children and youth programs that Ashley and Bryan lead so enthusiastically. As our church is entering into a new season, you probably have heard that The United Methodist Church is also moving into a new season. In the coming months we need to prayerfully consider the future of our Fort Payne First United Methodist Church through a process of discernment.

On July 26, 2022, the Administrative Board of FUMC voted to enter into a period of discernment. Notice of this intent was provided to the District Superintendent, Rev. Jeff Davis on July 29, 2022. On August 9, 2022, the Administrative Board established a Discernment Team, which is comprised of the following church members:

Patrick Barnes            Dana Brewis – Chairperson    Richard Camp

Larry Chesser            Randall Ham    John Massey    JoAnn Newton

Lisa Norquist            Ben Shurett    Betsy Smith    Pastor Jeff Tate

The role of the Discernment Team is to provide clear and factual information and to direct church members to quality resources. It is the mission of the Discernment Team to create a pathway to provide information so the congregation may make prayerful and informed decisions regarding God's Will for the future of the church.

Spiritual discernment is different from decision-making of practical matters and logistics. In contrast, it is a process of sitting in the presence of God as we listen for God's still quiet voice to lead us. It is about God's desires, not ours. It involves more listening, than talking. It requires willingness to be surprised by the outcome. It compels us to think about both unintended and intended consequences. It demands that we focus not on a decision, but on God's Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts. Churches considering disaffiliation are called to a community spiritual discernment process. It is likely that some members of the congregation will have different, maybe even seemingly contrasting insights to the majority. Community spiritual discernment considers all perspectives collectively in clarifying their discernment. Minority opinions and voices enhance the outcome of spiritual discernment.

During the time of discernment, the congregation should pray and discuss the issues. During this time all members will have an opportunity to learn and express their views. The Discernment Team will host speakers during the month of September in order to provide the members with information on the United Methodist Church, the Global Methodist Church, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Covenant Association and independent church status. Speakers are scheduled as follows:

September 11, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. District Superintendent Jeff Davis discussing the history, polity and doctrine of the United Methodist Church.

September 18, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. Pastor Ricky Smith presenting information regarding disaffiliation and the Global Methodist Church. Pastor Ricky may also answer questions about the Free Methodist Church and independent status.

September 29, 2022 at 6:00 Vaughn Stafford of the Wesleyan Covenant Association will share with the churches of the Mountain Lakes District.

During the month of October, members are asked to prayerfully consider the information that has been presented. Small groups and Sunday school classes will have the opportunity to discuss the issues and ask questions. The Discernment Team will review the results of the small group discussions, pray together regarding next steps, and will make a final recommendation to the Administrative Board based on the responses and desires of the members if a vote should be taken. If it is discerned that the church should vote to withdraw from the United Methodist Church, the District Superintendent will conduct a called church conference on November 13, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. for members of the church to vote. All are welcome to attend, however only members as certified by the membership secretary on the church roll and are present that day may vote.

It is the Discernment Team's desire that each member of the church will prayerfully listen for God's voice to guide them. The Discernment Team's goal is to provide each member with the opportunity to make an informed decision and to be a voice and part in the future of our church.

Blessings to you all,

Dana Brewis