

Important Questions to Consider

- **Why is our church considering separation from the United Methodist denomination?**

Due to the ongoing division taking place in the greater denomination of The United Methodist Church, congregations across the U.S. are being asked to choose their own pathways for future affiliation based on their core values and theological beliefs.

The history is long and complicated, but ultimately, upholding the traditional, apostolic witness of Holy Scripture as authoritative in all matters of faith and practice is the central reason why Fort Payne First is considering leaving The United Methodist Church.

- **Why is this happening now?**

In June 2022, Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett issued a letter and a process for churches considering its future affiliation with the United Methodist Church by late fall of this year — whether that's remaining in The United Methodist Church, staying in Wesleyan connection by affiliating with another Methodist denomination or becoming an independent church.

In August 2022 the Judicial Council announced that Bishops could call for a Jurisdictional Conference to allow for retirements, elections, and assignments for Bishops. The Southeastern Jurisdiction is scheduled to meet on November 2-4, 2022. At that time, we will know if our current bishop will be reassigned or if a new bishop will be assigned to serve North Alabama. A new incoming bishop is expected to be much more progressive in theology and practice and will carry the authority to re-assign our pastor to another church within our geographic region. Fort Payne First may have diminished input in the appointment of a new pastor.

Currently, Fort Payne First is one of an ever-growing number of churches in the N AL Conference currently in official discernment. This number is expected to continue to increase.

- **What will change if Fort Payne First leaves the UMC?**

Very little.

Fort Payne First will continue to advance its mission to help people know, follow, and share Jesus—regardless of denominational affiliation.

Fort Payne First's pastor, board, ministry partners and committed members are working to ensure the ministry and mission of the church advance without delay, interruption, or redirection.

- **What is happening with the denomination?**

On December 10, 2022, the North Alabama Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, that Fort Payne First is a part of, is holding a special conference for all local churches feeling led to disaffiliate from the denomination. The expectation is that many "doctrinally traditional" churches will leave the denomination and join the newly formed Global Methodist Church. Most "doctrinally progressive" churches will stay in the United Methodist Church (UMC). If this happens, then after the December vote, the UMC will become a more progressive expression of Methodism.

- **What is spiritual discernment?**

There are a variety of ways to make decisions. In the church, sometimes spiritual discernment is used particularly during deep and challenging decision making. Spiritual discernment is setting oneself or the community apart for a time of deep listening for the Holy Spirit's wisdom, insight and calling. It is not judging others (Matthew 7:1-2), but encountering God's wisdom and understanding in others, the community of faith and ourselves for discerning God's calling for the congregation and each of us individually.

- **What is needed for spiritual discernment?**

There are four things needed for spiritual discernment. Creating space and time to listen deeply and contemplate. Prayer, scripture reading and the words of Jesus to center and root ourselves spiritually. Openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit in ourselves and others. Holy conversation that listens to understand, responds with grace and respect for God and one another and recognizes that we are in conversation with one another and with God.

- **What is our discernment process?**

In the weeks ahead, you will find information on this website regarding our future affiliation. We ask that each member educate themselves about the UMC, the GMC, and any other options presented and the pros and cons of each. Meetings with small groups and other small to mid-size groups for sharing information and voicing thoughts will be held throughout the months of October. Larger churchwide gatherings will be held in September. All of this will culminate with a vote on Sunday, November 13, 2022 at 5:00pm. Our discernment process will be covered in prayer, as prayer is an important and integral part of discernment. We ask that each member pray for wisdom, clarity, and grace. We pray that the Holy

Spirit would move through and among us as we do this challenging work of discernment. You can find prayer resources on this webpage. We ask everyone to keep our main focus on God and growing his kingdom and not to let this upcoming decision distract us from our mission to help people know, follow, and share Jesus. We will pray, learn, and decide together as we share grace and truth in love.

- **Who made the recommendation to Fort Payne First to begin this process of discernment?**

The Administrative Board made the decision to enter the official discernment process on July 26, 2022. The church membership has the final vote on whether the church should disaffiliate.

- **What is the process to disaffiliate from the UMC?**

The North Alabama Annual Conference (NALC) laid out a clear process for each church seeking to separate from the UMC: 1) complete the appropriate period of discernment (90 days), 2) calculate apportionments and unfunded pension liability estimates, 3) conduct a congregational vote to disaffiliate, 4) pay in full previous year's apportionments and current year apportionments, 5) pay in full unfunded pension liability, 6) be approved for release by an affirmative vote of the North Alabama Annual Conference.

- **When will the change be official, if Fort Payne First votes to disaffiliate?**

December 31, 2022 A special called session of the North Alabama Annual Conference of the UMC will be held on December 10, 2022, for the purpose of voting to release local congregations that have completed the necessary steps and settled all financial and legal obligations to the NALC by that date. Fort Payne First will be among this group if our discernment period reveals a desire to leave the denomination.

- **What has to happen for our assets to be released?**

As long as we follow the steps laid out by the North Alabama Annual Conference, all of our assets will be released to us on January 1, 2023.

- **What is the financial impact of this transition if the vote is to disaffiliate?**

The financial obligations associated with disaffiliation in the North Alabama Annual Conference (NALC) are highly favorable compared to those of other

conferences around the nation. NAL requires the base minimum allowed by UMC governance regulations: 1) pay in full previous year's apportionments and current year apportionments and 2) pay in full unfunded pension liability. With the resolution that was passed at the Annual Conference.

- **Will the church retain our buildings and property?**

Completing the disaffiliation process ensures Fort Payne First will leave the United Methodist Church with our property and material assets, free of any trust clause referencing the denomination.

- **What happens to our property if we vote to affiliate with the GMC?**

If we vote to join the Global Methodist Church, all property and assets become ours. According to the Global Methodist Church's Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline local churches own all their property and assets. If we vote to remain in the United Methodist Church, the property continues to be held in trust for the North Alabama Annual Conference.

- **Does a new bishop have the right to change the trust clause or to change the current process to disaffiliate?**

The Bishop can't change the Trust clause, however, the bishop has influence on the process and can make it more or less challenging for churches. The current bishop, Debra Wallace-Padgett, has made the process favorable for churches to leave.

- **What is the trust clause and how does that affect our church?**

The trust clause is a historic, universal claim made by the UMC and written into the church's articles of incorporation in an effort to retain ownership rights of local church properties. Fort Payne First will be automatically released from this claim upon a final vote for disaffiliation by the North Alabama Annual Conference. The trust clause has historically made it very difficult for churches to leave if they are out of alignment with the direction or theology of the denomination.

- **Will we go into the Global Methodist Church?**

This is one option. The Discernment Team is still evaluating the available options and will make a recommendation to the congregation prior to the November 13 vote. You can learn more about the Global Methodist Church at <https://globalmethodist.org>

- **Could Fort Payne First become an independent church?**

This is one option, though perhaps not in the way most people think of “independent.” At the heart of it, we desire to stay in a connectional system with other Methodist/Wesleyan churches who share our same creedal orthodoxy. The Discernment Team is still evaluating options.

- **Where does our pastor stand on this issue? Does he support leaving the denomination?**

Our pastor fully supports the board's decision to enter into the discernment process. He has been fully aware of the UMC's growing tensions and mounting dysfunction along with the emergence of alternative choices and a pathway to exit the UMC. He is in careful consideration and study of the options and is expected to make his views known in the near future.

- **How will our staff be impacted by a transition away from the UMC?**

Fort Payne First's pastor would continue to serve as pastor in the UMC until the church's separation becomes final by a vote of the North Alabama Annual Conference. After that time, he could seek licensing and credentials from either a new denomination or independent licensing organization. Non-clergy staff will not be impacted.

- **Who gets to make the decision to part ways with the UMC, and when will that happen?**

Registered members of the church will have the opportunity to participate in a called church conference for the purpose of voting to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church. That vote would take place on November 13 at 5:00pm.

- **How will a decision be made as to whether or not to call for a vote in November?**

The Discernment Team, board, and pastor have studied the three options available: Stay in the UMC; Disaffiliate from UMC and affiliate with another denomination; Disaffiliate from UMC and join a network of independent Methodist churches. The Pastor and discernment team believes that a vote is necessary and will be held on November 13.

- **How and when will we vote?**

We will hold a called church conference on Sunday, November 13 at 5:00pm. The District Superintendent will be present to preside at this meeting. Members Votes must be cast in person with no absentee or proxy voting allowed. The process will be counted by a neutral party and the decision will be announced.

- **Who is eligible to vote?**

Current professing members of Fort Payne First.

- **As we move from our denominational ties, how do we keep ourselves from becoming susceptible to some of the things that are infecting the American church?**

In choosing to affiliate with a new denomination or network of churches, two of the aspects that are important are the theology of the new system and the accountability structure. We want to be a part of a connectional system that holds a creedal orthodoxy and theology that stands on scriptural authority-- A creedal church that proudly stands on the rich tradition and history of our church fathers and mothers. And we want to be a part of a system that ensures accountability that focuses on character, collaboration, and fruitfulness at all levels. Guided by these tenets, and trusting the Holy Spirit, we move forward in faith.

- **What are some of the progressive statements that are being made about theology?**

There are some progressives at seminaries, on the board of ordained ministry, and serving in episcopal roles who deny the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, for example. Though these statements do not represent all progressives, they are growingly being highlighted on UMC platforms.

- **What are the primary differences between the UMC and GMC?**

The primary differences between the UMC and GMC lie in their polity, which is the operational systems and governance of the church. There are no significant differences in the doctrine of the current UMC and the GMC. Specifically concerning the issue of human sexuality, the current written doctrine of the UMC and GMC are identical, but practices and theology regarding issues of sexuality widely differ among UMC clergy and laity. The GMC is planning to uphold the written doctrine, while the UMC may make changes at the 2024 General Conference. In addition, the current UMC has allowed numerous violations of the doctrine with no system of accountability in place.

- **How are clergy appointed in the GMC?**

Church councils and Staff Parrish Relations Committees work with the Presiding Elder and bishop to search for and place a qualified candidate. Churches may conduct their own search or may request candidates from the bishop.

- **Isn't the division in the UMC about accepting LGBTQIA+ people in the church? I've seen it in the news media.**

News media coverage often highlights UMC clergy and/or congregations that either advocate for or stand against full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons as clergy and as couples married in the church. At Fort Payne First, discernment and decisions are focused on the primary matters of scriptural authority — what orthodox Christians have always believed about God, Jesus and the Bible — above matters of full inclusion. Regarding this specific topic, Fort Payne First relies on the Scriptures to guide all matters of human relations, including sexuality.

- **What is our stance on LGBTQIA+ clergy and marriage?**

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church has been the same on this matter since 1972, and yet it is disregarded by progressive clergy and congregations across the denomination with no accountability or enforcement. Paragraph 304.3 of The Discipline says, "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Fort Payne First has always followed The Discipline and will continue to for as long as necessary, in adherence to the authority of Scripture regarding marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-5) and sexual practices outside of marriage (Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22).

- **Are LGBTQIA+ persons welcome at our church?**

Yes. Fort Payne First views all people as individuals of sacred worth. Therefore, LGBTQIA+ persons are invited to participate in worship as lay congregants or in ministry programs as lay participants. We extend welcome, grace and respect to all who call Fort Payne First their church home.