

Next Methodism Task Force Report

A recurring theme throughout the discernment process among the membership of the church as expressed in cottage meetings and listening sessions was a desire to maintain the core doctrines of the church, how we worship, our ministries, our staff, and our missional focus whether as a part of the UMC or apart from the UMC. At the August 16, 2022 Church Council Meeting the Church Council commissioned a task force to consider possible options for future affiliation should First Church Siloam Springs vote to disaffiliate from the UMC. The key consideration was “how does First Church Siloam Springs maintain its core identity as a Methodist expression of faith in Siloam Springs in the future should the congregation vote to disaffiliate from the UMC?” A secondary but crucial consideration was “how do we as a church plot a course for the future in such a way as to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty of ‘what’s next?’” It was then decided that a “Next Methodism Task Force” be formed so that work could be underway in the event that the church conference voted to disaffiliate and a recommended pathway for the future be presented at an upcoming church council meeting.

The Church Council appointed the following people to the Next Methodism Task Force: Manny Anchondo, Dr. Jim Blankenship, Brooke Coffey, John Eisenberg, Casey Kensinger, Karl Mounger, Katie Rennard, and Melody Taylor. The pastor was also appointed to the task force as the coordinator.

The task force had its first meeting on Sunday, August 21st and began with prayer and a desire to truly discern where God might be leading the church in the future.

With the key consideration of “how does First Church Siloam Springs maintain its core identity as a Methodist expression of faith” and a desire by the congregation to minimize change in its culture at the center of its discernment, at this first meeting the task force identified the following priority considerations when evaluating various options:

- Sound Wesleyan Theology
- Biblical/Attention to Scriptures
- Church Culture that resembles what we have now
- Connectionalism
- Accountability of leadership
- Finances (i.e., cost of affiliation, apportionments, etc.)
- Trust Clause/Property (i.e., No trust clause is preferred)
- Missional Focus
- Transparency in process

With these priorities in mind the task force began evaluating a list of the following options:

1. Become An Independent, Non-Denominational Church
2. Join a Loose Congregational Association
 - a. Association of Independent Methodists
 - b. Congregational Methodist Church
3. Affiliate with a Full Connectional Denomination
 - a. The Church of the Nazarene

- b. The Wesleyan Church
- c. Free Methodist Church
- d. The Global Methodist Church
- e. Evangelical Methodist Church
- f. Southern Methodist Church

While each appeared to exhibit sound Wesleyan theology, some more so than others, and at least from a cursory review of publicly available information all attend to Scripture, several of the options lack in one or more of the following areas: Connectionalism and Church Culture that resembles what we have now.

Becoming an independent non-denominational church would ensure the church culture remains largely the same, however, we would lose the Connectionalism that has existed in this congregation since its inception. There was concern expressed about the ability to hold fast to our Wesleyan doctrine as a church well into the future as the track record for Methodist churches who have gone independent is not great in this area. Research conducted by Wesleyan scholars at Asbury Seminary has shown that typically once Methodist churches have gone independent within 1-2 pastoral changes the church begins to become more Reformed in its theology and practice. The number of independent Methodist churches is quite small so any association would be small as well. There were also polity concerns expressed about being independent. So, for these reasons the task force discerned that becoming an independent non-denominational church or joining an association of independent Methodist churches would not be viable options for First Church Siloam Springs.

We next reviewed the characteristics of the Wesleyan/Methodist full connectional denominations. The Nazarene Church and Wesleyan Church both provide sound Wesleyan theology, are connectional, exhibit accountability in leadership, and have a strong missional focus. We could not determine transparency in process from our initial investigation. From a financial standpoint each would require apportionments equal or greater than what First Church currently contributes or is expected to contribute. The Nazarene Church would also require a Trust Clause. The Wesleyan Church requires a Trust Clause but there is the possibility that that may be relaxed for churches choosing to affiliate. For both churches there would be a considerable shift in church culture. The task force discerned that the shift in culture might be too much for the church to endure coupled with the trust clause requirement and the expense of belonging to the Nazarene Church and Wesleyan Church, and so these two options were discerned to be not advisable for First Church Siloam Springs.

The Task Force considered the Free Methodist Church which next to the Global Methodist Church is the denomination most open to receive affiliating churches. Like the Nazarene and Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church provides sound Wesleyan theology, is connectional, exhibits accountability in leadership, and has a strong missional focus. We could not determine transparency in process from our initial investigation. From a financial standpoint the Free Methodist Church would require apportionments equal or greater than what First Church currently contributes or is expected to contribute. Unlike the Nazarene Church or Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church does not require affiliating churches to include a Trust Clause in the deed to their property, at least at first. They have a 2–5-year affiliate status

but it is unclear after that initial period whether long-term the church would be permitted to remain affiliated without a trust clause on their property. During the initial affiliate status, the church would also not have full voting rights, etc. Like the Nazarene Church and Wesleyan Church, it would require a considerable shift in church culture as there are some significant differences in polity. The Task Force also discussed that all three churches (Nazarene, Wesleyan, and Free Methodist) emerged out of the Holiness Movement of the mid-1800's which includes prohibition from alcohol and participation in societies which require an oath (i.e., Masonic organizations, fraternities, sororities, PEO, etc.). This might prove to be a stumbling block for many within the church. The Task Force discerned that due to the shift in culture, less than full recognition status, and the expense of belonging to the Free Methodist Church that this option would not be advisable for First Church Siloam Springs.

The Task Force considered the Evangelical and Southern Methodist Churches. These are very small denominations with no churches near or likely to be near First Church, so Connectionalism would be nominal at best. They also had some theology that was troubling and the role of women in the church (i.e., leadership, clergy, etc.) was either not evident or discouraged. The Task Force discerned that these were disqualifying characteristics and does not recommend pursuit of affiliation with either denomination.

It was determined that after review of the above options that the Task Force would concentrate its time and effort in vetting the Global Methodist Church (GMC) and consider how it measures up both with the above priorities in mind, but specifically in the areas of Doctrine, Polity, and Witness (Missional Focus). Three work groups were formed in these areas and tasked with examining the GMC in these three areas.

Each of the three work groups met, reviewed the Global Methodist Church's Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline and other relevant information regarding this denomination and reconvened as a Task Force on September 13th to discuss their respective areas and findings.

The theology and doctrine of the Global Methodist Church is almost identical to that of the UMC with perhaps a greater emphasis on the historic creeds of the Church and Wesley's Standard Sermons. Like the UMC, the Articles of Religion of the former Methodist Church and Confessions of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren are the foundational doctrine of the GMC. Paragraph 109 of the Transitional Book of Doctrine and Discipline includes a Restrictive Rule which means that the core doctrines of the GMC are unalterable and cannot be changed, removed, or minimized in the future.

The polity of the GMC is quite similar to the UMC with large sections concerning the Local Church taken directly from the UMC Book of Discipline. The biggest difference in the GMC and UMC with regards to polity is with the elimination of large church general agencies and more "may" language rather than "shall" language. The Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline is much smaller (105 pages vs. 900+). There are accountability measures for clergy, bishops, laity, and churches which currently do not exist in the UMC. Further, the financial commitment is lower (6.5% max in apportionments, however, 2% or less in the next two years). There will not be a trust clause in the GMC.

The witness (missional focus) of the GMC is one which will include and foster cross-cultural missions, partnerships between local churches in different parts of the world (i.e., our church could directly partner with a local GMC church in Africa or Bulgaria, etc.). There is a strong emphasis already in church planting. Since the GMC is a new denomination the missional focus of First Church Siloam Springs likely would not change for the foreseeable future and may continue its local mission work and its support of OMP and UMCOR.

In Summary, the Task Force has discerned that the Global Methodist Church has sound Wesleyan theology, is Biblical and attends to Scriptures, will permit our church to maintain our current culture as a church, is connectional in its polity, has means for maintaining accountability of leadership, will require less in denominational funding and not require a trust clause on church property, and has a missional focus that permits our current local missions and encourages us to enter into cross-cultural partnerships and support church planting. For these reasons, it is our recommendation to the Church Council that should First Church Siloam Springs vote to disaffiliate from the UMC that it affiliates with the Global Methodist Church.

Appendix A Denominational Comparison

Independent/Non-Denominational and Loose Associations

Pros

- 1) Church culture remains the same

Cons

- 1) Number of Independent Methodist churches is small, any association would be small.
- 2) Studies show that once churches go independent, they tend to become more Reformed in theology and practice

The Nazarene Church and Wesleyan/Methodist Church

Pros

- 1) Sound Wesleyan theology
- 2) Connectional
- 3) Exhibit accountability in leadership
- 4) Strong missional focus

Cons

- 1) Apportionments are equal or greater than we currently are assessed in the UMC
- 2) The Nazarene Church requires a trust clause
- 3) Wesleyan Church requires a trust clause, but the rule may be relaxed for churches choosing to affiliate
- 4) Considerable shift in church culture, being significant differences in polity
 - a. Prohibition of alcohol and participation in societies that require an oath (i.e., Masonic organizations, fraternities, sororities, PEO, etc.)

Free Methodist Church

Pros

- 1) Sound Wesleyan theology
- 2) Connectional
- 3) Exhibits accountability in leadership
- 4) Strong missional focus
- 5) Affiliating churches do not initially, have a trust clause

Cons

- 1) Apportionments equal or greater than we currently are assessed in the UMC
- 2) During initial affiliation, the church would not have full voting rights
- 3) Considerable shift in church culture, being significant differences in polity
 - a. Prohibition of alcohol and participation in societies that require an oath (i.e., Masonic organizations, fraternities, sororities, PEO, etc.)

Evangelical and Southern Methodist Churches

Cons

- 1) Small denominations with limited Connectionalism
- 2) Troubling theology regarding the role of women in the church (i.e., leadership, clergy, etc.)

Global Methodist Church

Pros

- 1) GMC polity is quite like the UMC, large sections concerning the Local Church taken directly from the UMC Book of Discipline
- 2) Elimination of large church general agencies
- 3) More “may” language rather than “shall” language
- 4) Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline is much smaller than the UMC Book of Discipline, (105 pages vs. 900+)
- 5) Accountability measures for clergy, bishops, laity, and churches that do not currently exist in the UMC
- 6) Financial commitment is lower
- 7) No trust clause required
- 8) Missional focus will include and foster cross-cultural missions, partnerships between local churches in different parts of the world
- 9) Strong emphasis in church planting.
- 10) Since the GMC is a new denomination the missional focus of First Church Siloam Springs likely would not change for the foreseeable future and may continue its local mission work and its support of OMP and UMCOR.

Appendix B - Comparison Chart

PRIORITY CONSIDERATIONS											
	Sound Wesleyan Theology	Biblical/ Attn. to Scripture	Church Culture Similar to What We Have Now	Connectionalism	Accountability of Leaders	Finances (i.e. cost of affiliation, apportionments, etc.)	Trust Clause Required	Missional Focus	Transparency in Process	Special Comments	
METHODIST CHURCH OPTIONS	Independent Non-Denominational	Independent	YES	YES	NO	UNKNOWN	N/A	NO	CHURCH PLANTING	UNKNOWN	Research shows that after 1 - 2 pastoral changes, the church begins to become more reformed in its theology & practice
	Loose Congregational Association	Association of Independent Methodists	YES	YES	NO - TOO SMALL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	NO	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	No diversity in membership (i.e. white); No churches in Arkansas.
		Congregational Methodist Church	YES	YES	NO	UNKNOWN	SAME AS UMC	NO	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	Little diversity of membership.
		Church of the Nazarene	YES	NO	YES	YES	EQUAL OR GREATER THAN UMC	REQUIRES A TRUST CLAUSE	STRONG	UNKNOWN	It has a significant presence of progressive clergy and members and appears to be starting to fight the same battles internally as the UMC.
	Full Connectional Denomination	Evangelical Methodist Church	CONCERNS	YES	NO - TOO SMALL	UNKNOWN	SAME AS UMC	NO	MISSIONAL PRIORITIES SET BY GENERAL CONFERENCE	UNKNOWN	Concerns with theology.
		Free Methodist Church	YES	YES	YES	YES	EQUAL OR GREATER THAN UMC	NOT REQUIRED AT FIRST	CHURCH PLANTING & MISSIONARY TRAINING	UNKNOWN	Participation in societies (i.e. Masons, PEO, Fraternities & sororities) prohibited
		Global Methodist Church	YES	YES	YES	YES	LESS THAN UMC	NO	STRONG	YES	Theology, doctrine, & missional focus very similar to UMC.
		Southern Methodist Church	CONCERNS	YES	NO - VERY SMALL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	NO	NARROW	UNKNOWN	Leadership roles for women are discouraged
		Wesleyan Church	YES	YES	YES	YES	EQUAL OR GREATER THAN UMC	REQUIRES A TRUST CLAUSE	CHURCH PLANTING & GLOBAL PARTNERS	UNKNOWN	Participation in societies (i.e. Masons, PEO, Fraternities & sororities) prohibited