



FIRST CHURCH Siloam Springs

A United Methodist Congregation

Dear Friends,

On August 14, 2022, we held the third of three listening sessions as part of our formal period of discernment as it relates to the possibility of disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. At the conclusion of this listening session and in accordance with the discernment process required by the Arkansas Annual Conference we conducted a straw poll on whether or not to request a church conference be called to consider the motion to disaffiliate under paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline*. The straw poll results were 82-14 (85.4%) in favor of requesting a church conference be held to vote on a motion to disaffiliate. Therefore, our District Superintendent has been contacted and a Church Conference has been scheduled for Sunday, September 18, 2022, at 3:30 PM in our Fellowship Hall to consider the motion to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

At last night's monthly Church Council Meeting the Church Council developed the attached statement summarizing the results of the discernment process thus far. Over the past 70 days as we have been discerning the future of our church, more than 150 people have been engaged in either one or more of our three listening sessions or five cottage meetings. Additionally, I have met personally with nearly two dozen of you, and I am happy to meet with anyone at their request as you discern the future of this church. Throughout this period of discernment, I have marveled at both the level of engagement by our membership and the hearts of peace with which we have exhibited in our conversations. As such, I feel that our straw poll represents the will of the church and the next steps.

Which brings us to "what is the next step?" First, as I shared above, we will have a church conference on Sunday, September 18, 2022, at 3:30 PM. Doors will open at 2:45 PM for registration and we will have a time of fellowship and possible sing a few hymns before the business portion of the church conference begins at 3:30 PM sharp. Second, at that church conference if the professing members present at the meeting vote by 2/3 majority to disaffiliate then what the church becomes next (i.e., new denominational affiliation, etc.) will be considered (at a later date and time). To that point the Church Council at last night's meeting appointed a task force to consider what those options might be and to make a recommendation at a future meeting of the Church Council who will then recommend a pathway to the congregation who will have an opportunity to consider and decide on its future. This would only occur if the vote to disaffiliate is affirmed. Also, let me be very clear. This church no matter what it decides will remain a Methodist church and expression of Methodist/Wesleyan faith. This is core to our identity as a church and that will not change.

As we continue in the remaining twenty days or so of our formal period of discernment, I ask that you continue to pray for our church and for God's will and vision to be made clear as it relates to our future and that we continue to act with hearts of peace in our conversations. I firmly believe that God will only strengthen us through this process.


Rev. Clark



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Summary of Discernment Process

Over the course of the past three months a series of three listening sessions, five cottage meetings, and nearly two dozen individual meetings have taken place whereby over 150 people have had the opportunity to express themselves and to listen to what others have shared as it relates to disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. This process has been led by the laity of the church and supported by its pastor as it seeks to discern the future that God has in store for it. This process has been bathed in prayer and has been largely uncontentious. Views have been shared and respected. The overarching theme has been “how do we have a family discussion as a church and remain a family at its conclusion?”

At our third listening session held on August 14, 2022, the 96 professing members present and voting voted 82 to 14 (85.4%) to request a church conference be held on a motion to disaffiliate.

Paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline* requires that churches seeking to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church state that their reason for disaffiliation is for reasons of conscience regarding issues surrounding human sexuality. Key to our understanding is the first line of that paragraph “1. *Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience.*” This statement acknowledges the sentiment within our church family that while there may exist different perspectives regarding human sexuality we are most troubled by the “deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality” and how it has led to widespread violation and disobedience of the *Discipline*, selective enforcement of the *Discipline* by some bishops, a lack of accountability of both bishops and in some conferences pastors and churches, and growing theological pluralism. This deep conflict has led to confusion in our community that may impact our ability to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to live into our vision to be a *Christ centered church—a caring community growing deeper in faith, reaching out in love, and making a difference in the lives of our neighbors near and far.*

As the deep conflict within The United Methodist Church has harmed people across the theological spectrum and has created a level of dysfunction which compromises the Gospel, we have discerned as detailed below and by virtue of our straw poll, that a church conference should be held to vote on disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church under paragraph 2553.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Church Council of First United Methodist Church of Siloam Springs
John Brown III, Chair



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Listening Session 1 Minutes

Fellowship Hall

Date/Time: June 26, 2022, at 4:00 pm

53 people were in attendance

1. Pastor Clark Atkins welcomed everyone and gave introductory remarks and then led the group with a prayer. He introduced District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Blake Bradford to lead us in our first listening session.
2. Rev. Bradford gave a greeting and stated the importance of a fair, open and transparent process for everyone.
3. Rev. Bradford presented a slide presentation from Bishop Gary Mueller entitled “Information About the Landscape”. It was an overview of the church discipline from the 1970’s to the present.
4. Details of the Disaffiliation process were given including the following:
 - Link to the Conference Web Page Resource: <https://docs.arumc.org/Disaffiliation/>
 - The Major Steps in the Disaffiliation Process:
If the majority of those professing members in attendance at the third listening session vote in a straw poll in favor of continuing in the process, then the District Superintendent will schedule a Church Conference which will require 2/3 of the professing members in attendance voting in favor of disaffiliation. At that point a Standard Disaffiliation Agreement between the Conference Trustees and our Church’s trustees would be entered into and finally the Agreement would have to be Ratified by a majority vote of the Annual Conference and all final details completed. It was stressed that it was the will of the congregation, not of the clergy.
 - Pointed out were estimated costs of the Church Liability Calculation.
 - There was time given for Questions and Answers concerning the Disaffiliation process.
5. Options for churches going through the Discernment process:
 - Move forward with Disaffiliation.
 - Stop or postpone the process until a decision from the Judicial Council or the General Conference is made.
 - Do nothing and stay in the United Methodist Church.
 - If your church votes to stay and you don’t agree, you are welcome to transfer to another congregation.
 - If your church votes to Disaffiliate and you don’t agree, you can transfer to another United Methodist congregation or contact the District Superintendent for help in finding another church where you can thrive.
6. The microphone was shared with members for questions or comments.
7. Rev. Clark Atkins gave a summary of the Discernment Plan.
 - A Special Pastor’s Note was sent out June 8.

- Pastor met in person with those interested on June 12 after the Worship Service.
 - Announcements concerning the Listening Sessions was and will continue to be in the Weekly (Thursdays) First Happenings.
 - Resources can be found on the church's website page (Church Discernment).
 - The Second Listening Session will be July 24 at 3:00 in the Fellowship Hall. There will be two speakers, one advocate to remain in the United Methodist Church and another to disaffiliate and potentially join the Global Methodist Church. You may submit written questions that will be addressed at that time.
 - The Third Listening Session will be August 14 at 11:00 following the Worship Service. There will be representatives from our congregation sharing their opinions. A Straw Poll will be taken after this meeting.
 - The Church Council will meet Aug. 16. to formulate a statement and summarize the findings of the discernment process and discuss next steps.
8. John Brown III, Chair of the Church Council emphasized that the Church Council has questions and is committed to find out answers to our questions. This period of Discernment will allow all members to have the same information. He reminded everyone that this process is not led by our pastor, but this is a process for our entire church family.
 9. Rev. Clark Atkins closed the meeting in prayer.

Respectfully Submitted: Melody Taylor, (Substitute) Recording Secretary

Listening Session 2 Minutes

Fellowship Hall

Date/Time: July 24, 2022, at 3:00 pm

61 People were in attendance

1. Welcome and Prayer, Pastor Clark

Pastor Clark opened in prayer and welcomed guests. He also announced six upcoming cottage meetings designed to answer questions and discuss concerns related to the discernment process in a smaller setting.

2. Introductory Remarks and Explanation of Two Possible Options, Pastor Clark

Pastor Clark introduced Rev. Beth Latham, pastor of Pottsville United Methodist Church (UMC) and Rev. Wes Hilliard, pastor of Heritage UMC in Van Buren. Beth was invited to share why she supports remaining in the UMC, and Wes was invited to share why he supports disaffiliation from the UMC and joining the Global Methodist Church (GMC). Pastor Clark reiterated that the question before the congregation at this time is whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC and any future affiliation with another denomination or going independent would happen later only if the church first votes to disaffiliate.

3. Presentations by Revs. Beth Latham and Wes Hilliard

Rev. Beth Latham shared for appx. 20 minutes on why she advocates for remaining UMC. Rev. Wes Hilliard shared for appx. 20 minutes on why he advocates for disaffiliation from the UMC and joining the GMC.

4. Written Q&A, Facilitated by Pastor Clark and Lay Leader John Brown III

Those who wished to ask questions of either Rev. Beth Latham or Rev. Wes Hilliard were asked to submit their questions in writing. 11 questions were submitted for Beth, and 10 questions were submitted for Wes. Pastor Clark read each question and allowed them to respond to their

respective questions. The Q&A portion took appx. 30 minutes. Pastor Clark closed the Q&A session and encouraged those who still had questions or concerns to ask them or bring those to one of the cottage meetings. He also announced the third Listening Session scheduled for Aug 14.

5. Closing Remarks & Prayer, John Brown III

John Brown thanked those who attended, those who submitted questions, and both Beth and Wes for sharing their respective views. John closed in prayer. The meeting adjourned at 4:37 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Lynn Blankenship

Cottage Meetings Report

5 Cottage Meetings were held on July 31 & August 7, 2022

50 people attended the series of cottage meetings

Agenda for Cottage Meeting

I. Open w/ Prayer

II. Purpose & Promise

- a. Explain the purpose of these cottage meetings.
- b. Share Promise to answer questions as honestly as possible and when making statements of commentary label it as such.

III. Q & A with the Pastor

- a. What questions or concerns do you have about this process of discernment regarding the possibility of disaffiliation?
- b. Knowing the perspectives of others in this congregation concerning disaffiliation, do you feel your perspective is in the minority?
 - i. If you are in the minority, do you feel you are being given a voice?
 1. If not, how might we give greater voice to your minority perspective?
- c. What do you hope to learn in the next listening session?

IV. Closing

- a. Have you enjoyed this meeting?
- b. Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?
- c. Closing prayer by a member

Summary of Questions asked and Explored During the Cottage Meetings:

- When does a decision regarding disaffiliation have to be made and when did we enter the process of discernment?
- What happens after December 31, 2023 if the church decides at that time if it wishes to disaffiliate?
- Who is permitted to vote?
- Who sets the amount required to disaffiliate, who can change it, and can it change?
- What is the timeframe to pay the amount required to disaffiliate?
- Please explain the Trust Clause and who would own the property after disaffiliation.
- What will the ballot at the straw poll say and what will the ballot at a church conference to disaffiliate say?
- What happens to the pastor if the church votes to disaffiliate?
- Why has the UMC struggled for 50 years over the issue of human sexuality?
- What is the position of the UMC vs. GMC as it relates to human sexuality?
- Why have bishops been allowed to not uphold the discipline or enforce it when it has been violated?
- What will happen at the third listening session, and do we have to have a straw poll?
- How will the straw poll work?

- What steps can we take so that this does not turn into a divisive process?
- May we discuss the other reasons people are interested in disaffiliation beyond the issue of human sexuality?
- We are thankful this has not become a contentious issue within the church and hope this continues.
- Has there always been a process to disaffiliate and might the ability to disaffiliate extend past 12/31/23?
- Who disciplines bishops?
- What is accountability in the Global Methodist Church for bishops?
- Who has written the Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline for the GMC?
- Is there a statement of faith that pastors and churches joining the GMC will be expected to sign?
- What are the apportionments in the GMC vs. the UMC?
- Does the GMC tolerate people not paying apportionments?
- What percentage of the church would leave if the church disaffiliated and what percentage of the church would leave if the church remained UMC?
- Would the church still be able to support UMCOR and OMP if it disaffiliates?
- Does disaffiliation mean joining the GMC or something else?
- If vote to disaffiliate how soon does that happen?
- What ways has the UMC changed over the years?
- If vote to disaffiliate, what about property, will things basically be the same?
- Does the GMC have a seminary?
- Can you lose your property if you join another denomination?

Summary of Comments Regarding Minority Voices Being Heard:

- These cottage meetings have been helpful, and I feel my concerns are being heard and addressed.
- This has been an inclusive process and I'm thankful the space has been given to share my concerns.
- Cottage meetings have given voice to minority perspective.
- Pastor is commended for his role in this process and availing himself to meet with people in these cottage meetings and in one-on-one meetings and ensuring all perspectives are heard.

Listening Session 3

Fellowship Hall

Sunday, August 14, 2022, 11:00 AM

96 Professing Members were in attendance

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Prayer

John Brown III opened the listening session with a greeting and Pastor Clark offered a prayer

2. Opportunity to Share

- John Brown asked if anyone would like to share their hopes and dreams for the church as it relates to disaffiliation or remaining UMC. The following members shared their thoughts and comments: Joallen Moose, Manny Anchondo, Susan Morris, Jessica Foster, and Karen White.
- John Brown asked if there were any questions before we took the straw poll. No questions were asked.
- John Brown identified the tellers: Jim Blankenship, Sloane Coffey, Karl Mounger, and Katie Rennard

3. Instructions for the Straw Poll

John Brown III gave instructions for and presided over the Straw Poll:

- Members who desired to vote received a ballot as they entered.
- Members were informed they were voting on whether to request a Church Conference from our District Superintendent to vote on whether or not to disaffiliate.
- Members were informed the straw poll requires a simple majority vote of those present to request a church conference, and that a 2/3 majority would be required at a Church Conference to disaffiliate.
- Members were informed that the tellers (Jim Blankenship, Sloane Coffey, Karl Mounger, and Katie Rennard) would be responsible for collecting ballots and counting them. Members were instructed to either raise their hand when they had voted so a teller could collect their ballot, or they could choose to place their ballot in a prepared ballot box.
- Time was then given for members to mark their ballots and turn them in.

4. Announcement of Straw Poll Results

John Brown III announced the following Straw Poll results:

Professing Members Present: 96

Votes **FOR** requesting a Church Conference: **82**

Votes **AGAINST** requesting a Church Conference: **14**

With **85.4% voting for requesting a Church Conference**, our District Superintendent will be contacted, and a date will be scheduled and announced in the near future.

5. John Brown III closed the meeting with prayer.

Respectfully submitted by Lynn Blankenship