

Discernment Team (DT) and Administrative Team meeting along with congregation members Sept. 13, 2022, 7 PM in the Dining Hall

Mary Sansing opened the meeting and spoke on the Discernment Team papers that are mostly finished and going to be published on the Wesley Memorial web site. Many are already posted. She talked about the reasons for the change in the timeline for the Discernment Team and a copy of her remarks is attached. Our original timeline was based on the hope that the Protocol for Reconciliation & Grace through Separation would pass the General conference in 2024, which is now highly unlikely. The only viable option to disaffiliate without being subject to the Trust Clause, if the church votes to do so, is paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline (BOD) which has a sunset clause of December 31, 2023.

Reverend Jeff Patterson then spoke about the process of discerning whether to stay affiliated with the changing UMC or vote to disaffiliate, which takes a 2/3 vote of the congregation.

Barbara Coughlin then said that the DT has worked diligently to fulfill its mission to objectively gather information on the issues surrounding disaffiliation and disseminate this information to the congregation.

Tom Smothers asked what the 2/3's vote is. Jeff responded that the Book of Discipline defines a quorum as the full, professing members of the church present and voting. Professing members means those on the church roll. Jeff said there would be 10 days' notice before any meeting and voting.

Stuart asked if there were any financial ramifications.

Harvey Lowd responded that if Wesley Memorial decides to disaffiliate, we would owe the Western NC Annual Conference 2 years of apportionments, which is currently \$188,000/year, plus the church's unfunded pension liability. Wespeth, the company that handles the clergy pension fund, would calculate the unfunded pension liability. Actual financial cost is not given until the church calls the District Superintendent (DS) about the possibility of disaffiliating. The current good financial situation of the church was raised because the church has 120 new members since January 2021 and unpledged giving is up significantly.

Don Shaw asked: If the church is paying apportionments, why is there unfunded pension liability? Harvey said that the Western NC Conference determines pension liability.

Tom Smothers asked if the packet sent by the Western NC Conference had been read by the DT and would be put on the church website.

Tom asked if the DT has recommended a straw vote on the congregation? Mary responded that a straw vote had been discussed and would be an option that leadership could consider.

Tom asked about timing of the discernment process. Jeff responded that the DS needs to be contacted by mid-October because we only have until April 1 to get a request to the Western NC Annual Conference if the congregation votes to disaffiliate and we want to use BOD paragraph 2553. The process of calling for a vote does not begin until the DS is contacted. Jeff said that in many congregations the lay leadership has asked for a straw ballot vote.

Tom Smothers asked who comprises the Church Council. Mary responded that the Church Council has the lay leaders and lay team chairpersons. The DS would come and call a church conference that is all

members of the congregation who show up for the meeting. Jim Holcomb interjected that what the DS calls is termed a Charge Conference.

Jim asked, in a short timeline, how can we get the congregation informed and get a feel for whether people want to disaffiliate?

Mac Lane suggested taking a straw vote to get the feeling of the congregation.

Mary Mason asked: Are we on board with other UMC's handling this?

Jeff responded that 100 churches in the Western NC Conference are in the process of disaffiliating and 180 churches in the North Carolina Conference are in the process.

Mary Mason asked: Are more churches than not having this stay or disaffiliate conversation? Jeff said that WMUMC is in a leadership role on the issue.

Ned Covington asked if BOD paragraph 2553 could be extended? Jeff responded that UMC Annual conferences can add further restrictions to paragraph 2553 and 15 annual conferences have done so. The expiration date is unlikely to be extended.

Bill Millis then spoke as a third or fourth generation family member and asked: what is the real difference in UMC and GMC? It is time to resolve the issue. If the church disaffiliates, what is the financial issue? He asked what are we standing for: the Biblical view or the world view?

Tom Smothers asked that the DT post information on the pros and cons of UMC. The pros of Staying UMC is a topic currently being researched and the paper will be posted soon.

Someone asked about looking at alternatives to the UMC. Jeff said that Frazier Memorial did not go GMC, but chose Free Methodist.

Iris Sunshine asked about information on the website from the DT. She said Pros of joining the GMC are posted and when will the cons of joining the GMC be posted?

Mary said that the DT decided to ask clergy to be part of the team because every other church committee/team has clergy presence and the DT felt that we need clergy presence as well. She said that Pastors are God-given gifts to shepherd our congregation and we should take advantage of His provision.

Mac Lane said: would we agree that this is a mess? He thinks we should take a vote.

Mary said that Rev. Amy Coles' video is available on the website

Katherine Covington asked: If a vote is taken at Wesley Memorial and the church then wants to change its vote, is that possible? Jeff responded that if we join the GMC, our church can leave at any point without dealing with a Trust Clause. No other Methodist denomination has a Trust Clause. If we choose to stay UMC, then property remains subject to the UMC trust clause.

Jeff said that most churches do not want the discernment process to be too long because it divides the church. Denominations impact local churches financially and in clergy appointments. After the 2019 General Conference, many delegates and their churches decided it was time to end the 30 years of division. Since 1856 Wesley Memorial has been part of 5 different Methodist denominations.

Patty McLarty asked: How do we decide where we are going? It is two votes: The first vote is whether to disaffiliate and the second is to decide with whom to affiliate.

Jim Holcomb said to please ask questions and get informed.

Rev. Lisa Tanico read John 14:1 "Let not your hearts be troubled..." She then closed the meeting with a prayer that this is all about God.

Submitted by Barbara Coughlin