

Summary of November 2, 2022,
Prayer and Discernment Team Meeting

Present for the meeting were: Steve White, Dale Cohen, Will Beadle, Al Ford, Kathy Gamble, Lisa Keys-Mathews, Mak Knowlden, Katy Beth Carr, Calvin Durham, Terry Buchanan, Lindsey Mussleman Davis, Ann Lyndon, and Terry Stubblefield.

Mak opened the meeting with the Wesleyan unity prayer and devotional utilizing Judges 11:30 - 39. She encouraged us to reflect upon the example of Jephthah: prayer is God's will to protect us from doing things too quickly. God is patiently waiting for us to take the right path. Questions for reflection were:

How do we know when God affirms our values and convictions?

When are we trying to manipulate God rather than work with God?

How can we tell if we are acting on our own promises and principles or on God's promises and principles?

The team discussed the proposed questionnaire/survey. Some modifications were made to the survey questions to assure that all answering could be categorized properly. The survey can be accessed at bit.ly/3NuybNw. It was again noted that there would be no scoring of any of the surveys until after the deadline for submission on November 11, 2022. The survey will be available from November 3, 2022 - November 11, 2022. The survey will be accessible by email, hard copy and in the Order of Worship, Messenger and digital Messenger.

A motion was made to move forward with the survey, which was seconded and was unanimously approved.

Discussion then followed as to getting out information from the team to the congregation. Some team members felt that the information was not forth coming as quickly as might be desired by members of the congregation. Discussion followed that it was necessary that the information be correct and proper as to the Discernment process which began a little more than a month earlier. The team were encouraged to work together and to get the information correctly out, not just quickly. Some concern was expressed as to sending too much information at one time which could overload and could result in congregational members not paying attention to all of the information. The consensus was that sending out the questionnaire immediately is a good start to dissemination of Discernment information.

Discussion was had as to the possibility of a vote. Some team members relayed hearing from congregational members as to whether or not they sought to vote. The process of determining if a vote is to occur was further discussed. The consensus was to move forward and see what the survey revealed to better aid in providing a snapshot of the congregation's initial feelings as to his/her position as to Discernment issues. All agreed that it was important that the congregation be reassured that all voices are being heard and considered.

Also discussed was the information as to Discernment being provided to the youth. The youth have not discussed the specific issue, but have been provided information with regard to the Discernment process itself.

The team discussed the importance of congregational understanding of the Discernment issue as set forth in ¶2553.

Discussion then followed as to the Discernment process availability on the Discernment page website. The Discernment model which the team is utilizing is the Bishop's model and will be provided on the website in the future for all to review and study. The team then discussed moving forward with providing information to the congregation. The team discussed setting meetings for the congregation to review varying points of view utilizing the Rob Renfro, Adam Hamilton and possibly John Robbins videos. Plans were made to arrange for screenings of the videos by the congregation in the month of January. The exact dates will be in conjunction with the Church calendar to assure the greatest participation possible from the congregation.

Additionally, the team will be reaching out to various speakers who will be presented live. The team anticipates the speakers would be followed by group discussions. The team expects that these programs would last approximately 2 hours and would take place either on a Wednesday night or a Sunday afternoon to promote the greatest congregational participation.

The team anticipates the speakers would be presented during the month of February. The team agreed that resources and information would continue to be available and updated for the congregation during the Advent season. Possible speakers included Vaughn Stafford, Brian Erickson and Tyler Christianson. Dale will reach out to each of them about the possibility of being speakers. The recommendation was made that the schedule of events continue to be included in the Messenger and Order of Worship. Another suggestion was to have Frequently Asked Questions as to Discernment on the Discernment website.

Concerns were addressed about laying out the Discernment process and making it informative to the congregation. A suggestion was to have a church meeting to provide the information. Discussion included noting that the congregation is interested in the process, but may still have some confusion about what Discernment truly is. All agreed that providing resources and information to the congregation and keeping the congregation informed as to the process is vital to the success of the Discernment process.

As to a church meeting, discussion included the possibility of providing information, but concerns were expressed about issues not related to Discernment and finger-pointing side tracking such a meeting. All agreed that the any future meetings need to assure that the issues are kept on track and that substantive content as to Discernment is provided.

The Discernment team has been doing hard work and was encouraged to fast and pray in support of the Discernment process and team members and to deliberate upon the work which we have done and will be doing. The team discussed taking a meeting hiatus for 4 weeks of Advent to pray and to ask for spiritual guidance in the Discernment process during this holy season.

Following this, the team discussed concern about the First Florence Vote emails which had been sent. Concern was expressed that the group was wholly anonymous. Anonymously sent information will not be placed on the website. Any information which is placed on the Discernment website will be vetted by the team before placing it there. It was felt by some of the team that these emails, which are being sent, undermine and delay the Discernment process unnecessarily. At best, these emails are counterproductive. The team is concerned about the appearance that the emails are from the church itself and there are concerns that this will confuse the congregation.

In response, it was expressed that the Florence First Vote felt that they would be censored. Information for consideration by the team was provided to the team from the Florence First Vote. It was expressed that the letter sent out the day before the September 25, 2022 meeting was meant to be innocuous, not divisive, but was apparently not taken in that vein.

Discussion also included the position letters sent out by Dale as to the issues at hand.

The team discussed that the Discernment is for a reason. Discussion included that the Florence First Vote stated position was to make sure all sides were heard. Some team members expressed concern about feeling targeted by the Florence First Vote and implications made in their emails that a decision had already been made by the Discernment team and that the process of Discernment was not a genuine Discernment effort. In response, it was postulated that the Florence First Vote felt they had no power and would be retaliated against if their identities were known. This was promptly countered by other members of the Discernment team that that the Florence First Vote has no less membership rights than non-Florence First Vote members.

Concern was expressed that sending of emails by Florence First Vote is not utilizing the proper process for emails to be sent to the Discernment team. Concern was expressed that it is not fair to speculate as to who may be a member of Florence First Vote, especially when members of the Florence First Vote have not challenged or offered an alternative view from that set forth by the Book of Discipline. Also, it appeared that the Florence First Vote implied that if the vote was to disaffiliate they would be satisfied, but if it did not go their way that they would feel the process had been a failure. To do so would appear to allow the Florence First Vote to have it both ways. Opinions were expressed that Florence First Vote was attempting to bully the committee and impugn the team with implications that the Discernment team is "top-heavy" and that the decision had already been made, both of which are patently incorrect.

Under the Discernment process, the Discernment team is not the final decision-maker as to disaffiliation. The final determination under the process set out by the Bishop is with the Administrative Board. The Discernment team cannot not guarantee a vote will take place.

A question was asked as to whether the senior minister could call for a vote. That question has been posed to the district superintendent who has not yet responded, however, Dale noted that to call for a vote would violate the Book of Discipline under paragraph 2553. Discussion included whether or not a minister should call for a congregational vote.

It was pointed out that the Bishop's model does not provide for a vote if there is a recommendation for FUMC to remain United Methodist. The question has been posed to the district superintendent who has not yet responded as to whether there is a process for a congregational vote if the Administrative Board determines that FUMC will remain United Methodist.

Dale pointed out that anyone who believes that homosexuality is wrong cannot justify using Paragraph 2553 to disaffiliate from the UMC, especially since the North Alabama Conference is in compliance with all provisions of the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality; therefore, he will not call for a vote. To do so would be to violate the Discipline. Dale stated that he has and always will follow the book of Discipline, including the directives regarding human sexuality.

Dale was requested to come and speak to a Sunday school class as to this issue which he agreed to do.

It was expressed that the Florence First Vote was created because they wanted a vote and feel marginalized. It was acknowledged that if a vote was taken they would have to determine whether they accepted the decision or not. Florence First Vote felt that there was indecisiveness as to the vote and felt that they were global issues going on, not just at Florence First United Methodist. Florence First Vote felt that a vote would give them closure.

Other members noted that Florence First Vote does not speak for all the members of FUMC. It was noted that at least in part, Florence First Vote, while feeling marginalized, may have contributed to this in not participating actively in worship and honoring all of their vows of FUMC membership.

Concern was also expressed that economic, rather than theological, issues underlie some of the motivations of Florence First Vote as indicated in some of their emails.

Concern was expressed that the team could not operate from fear of what other groups might assert as that is simply not the Methodist way. We must act out of faith and in accord with the Book of Discipline.

It was also expressed that Florence First Vote felt that they were not being given respect in the process, but it was noted, respect is a two-way street.

We were also reminded that part of the beauty of United Methodism is that people with differing opinions and ideas can worship together and accomplish great things. As a team, we will continue to pray for our church, our team and our congregation in this process.

The next meeting was set for November 28, 2022 at 6:00 PM.

Summary of November 28, 2022,
Prayer and Discernment Team Meeting

Present for the meeting were: Steve White, Dale Cohen, Will Beadle, Al Ford, Kathy Gamble, Lisa Keys-Mathews, Mak Knowlden, Katy Beth Carr, Calvin Durham, Terry Buchanan, Lindsey Mussleman Davis, Ann Lyndon, Paula Michaels, Gary Jester and Terry Stubblefield.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Terry Stubblefield followed by devotional from Steve White. The devotional focused on approaches to the future of Christianity. Steve encouraged us all to have an open heart with a sense of empowerment with the hope of viewing our past as part of the ever evolving church. He encouraged us to be accepting of change and adaptation for our future. He noted that we will face change that leads to new beginnings and that we must trust the Holy Spirit to help us discern what lies ahead in the future. We were encouraged to work together despite our differences.

Lisa Keys-Mathews provided a review of the survey responses. Discussion followed as to how best to provide this information to the congregation. 280 responses were received through the various response avenues. The survey reflected that 71% of the respondents aligned as compatibilist and 28% identified as non compatibilist. The committee reviewed the information from the survey as to the questions posed. Following this, the team discussed what the responses reflected and what questions the congregation had posed in response.

The team discussed the need to educate the church more fully on the process of Discernment and providing further information to the congregation. The congregation indicated through the questions posed a desire to have information provided to them as to all aspects of Discernment. The team agreed to the importance of emphasizing the issues and process of Discernment under ¶2553. Various aspects of Discernment and specifics of exactly what was included under Discernment was further discussed. All agreed that getting as much information to the congregation regarding the Discernment process and the consequences thereof was imperative. Discussion was had as to how to best get the information out based upon commentary from the congregation. Additional information will be posted on the Discernment team website. One team member reflected that FUMC Florence needed to understand the specific consequences of disaffiliation and as well as those of remaining UMC as to its specific effect on FUMC.

Discussion was also had as to setting up a frequently asked questions drop down on the website. The team agreed to all submit questions suggested to be placed on the website, including the question and the answer. These will be due by December 9, 2022. The Q&A's will then be sent and reviewed by the entire team and determination as to what questions and answers to provide. As to the frequently asked questions portion, suggestions were made to have links so that if further information as to the question was sought it would be readily accessible.

The frequently asked questions section which is being developed will, in part, be reflective of questions posed by the congregation in the survey responses.

It was agreed that the website would be updated from time to time as various issues arise.

Discussion was had about the possibility of developing a blog which will be considered.

Discussion followed as to concerns about fearmongering ongoing in the process and the importance of staying on track with positivity as to Discernment.

Discussion was had as to the persistent question as to whether a vote would occur or not. Discussion was then had as to the specific provisions under ¶2553 and under what circumstances a vote would occur. We were reminded that we must follow the Bishop's process as set out. To do otherwise would have the team violating the Book of Discipline.

Some concern was again raised as to concerns about interference in the process by negative anonymous sources. All were encouraged to attempt to rise above the "us versus them" mentality in proceeding forward.

The importance of assuring the congregation that their voices are being heard through the survey and otherwise was reaffirmed.

Discussion was had as to the emails received by the Discernment team and how best to respond to those inquiries. The congregation will be encouraged to email the team if they felt the frequently asked questions did not address issues which they had. The congregation will be encouraged to pose questions which they had through the emails which will then be addressed appropriately by the Discernment team.

A suggestion was made to develop a timeline to be displayed the website to let the congregation know how the Discernment process is proceeding. The plan is to have additional information on the website to address the frequently asked questions and other matters relating to the Discernment process.

Video sessions are being set up to view the Rob Renfroe and Adam Hamilton videos. (Terry Stubblefield's Sunday school class is using these already). A schedule of the sessions which will be on Mondays for 6 weeks beginning on January 9, 2023 at 10:00 AM and Wednesdays beginning at 6:00 PM on January 11, 2023. Two team members will be present for each of the sessions to facilitate.

A congregational meeting will host Vaughn Stafford and Bryan Erickson on February 5, 2023 from 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM. Bus drivers will be recruited to assure that all members are able to attend if they so desire. Questions will be submitted for discussion by the presenters.

We are waiting to hear back from the Bishop as to her availability to speak to the congregation.

The next scheduled meeting of the team will be January 5, 2023 at 6:00 PM. Dale Cohen closed the meeting with prayer.

Discernment Process

1. Why is Florence First UMC going through the Discernment Process?

A group of individuals in our congregation called for the Church to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church denomination. Bishop Wallace-Padgett from the North Alabama Conference established that each church wishing to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church under ¶ 2553 of the Book of Discipline (link to section) must go through a discernment process of at least three months.

2. How were the members of the Discernment Team chosen to serve?

Each Sunday School selected one member to serve on the Team. One Sunday School has alternating team members. The choir also selected a member since they meet during the Sunday School hour. The team is comprised of (link to team members).

3. What is the Discernment Team doing?

The Team is meeting once or twice a month, usually for 2-3 hours at a time. The team is seeking to discern God's will for Florence First United Methodist Church by praying, studying, listening, and contemplating the ramifications of this decision. A summary of the Team's meetings can be found here (include link). The Team is making every effort to ensure that there is transparency in the process.

4. Will the Discernment Team determine what Florence First UMC will do?

No. The Discernment Team has no decision-making authority for the congregation. They will bring a recommendation that has been prayerfully discerned to the Church's Administrative Board. The Administrative Board is the decision-making body of the church.

5. How will the voices of Florence First UMC members be heard?

The Team members are discussing the issues with Sunday School classes. A survey was recently put out to all members, providing an opportunity for individuals to voice their concerns and questions to the Team. Members of Florence First UMC are also encouraged to email discernment@fumcflo.org. Beginning in January, there will be weekly video series with two speakers of opposing viewpoints discussing the United Methodist Church denomination and its future. Members of the Discernment Team will be present for the videos to facilitate a discussion. In February, there will be an event with two speakers at our Church to discuss the United Methodist Church and Global Methodist Church.

Our goal is to hear from as many of the members of Florence First UMC as possible. Following these sessions, the Team will prepare a report to present to the congregation and Administrative Board. The Team's goal is to have its report finalized by the end of March 2023.

6. How is the Florence First Vote involved in the Discernment process?

Florence First Vote is comprised of a group of members who have chosen to make their voices heard collectively as a group through emails, a website, and a private Facebook group. They define themselves as follows (link to page). The Discernment Team is listening to the voices and concerns of the Florence First Vote group and all members of the congregation. Florence First Vote is not a part of the Discernment Team. Part of the Covenant that each member of the Discernment Team agreed to was to forego from actively participating in recruitment of individuals to a particular "side." (link to covenant)

Neither Florence First UMC nor the Discernment Team provided the Florence First Vote group with members' contact information.

7. Will the congregation take a church-wide vote following the Discernment Team's recommendation to the Administrative Board?

That will depend both on what the Discernment Team's recommendation is and whether or not the Administrative Board approves or rejects the recommendation. Each of the following is a possible scenario once the Discernment Team's recommendation is given to the Administrative Board for consideration.

a) SCENARIO 1: The Discernment Team recommends to the Administrative Board that Florence First UMC should remain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church.

In the event of this scenario, should the Administrative Board vote to accept the Discernment Team's recommendation for Florence First UMC to remain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church, then a church-wide vote would not be necessary and Florence First UMC would remain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church.

In the event of this scenario, should the Administrative Board vote to reject the Discernment Team's recommendation for Florence First UMC to remain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church, then a church-wide vote would be scheduled for a later date to determine whether or not Florence First UMC would remain a local congregation of the United Methodist Church or disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

b) SCENARIO 2: The Discernment Team recommends to the Administrative Board that Florence First UMC should disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church and become an independent congregation or join another expression of Methodism.

In the event of this scenario, should the Administrative Board vote to accept the Discernment Team's recommendation, then a vote of the entire congregation would be scheduled for a later date to determine whether or not Florence First UMC would disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. The vote would take place on one day by paper ballot at the church. Members must vote in person. A 2/3 vote of members present is required to disaffiliate.

In the event of this scenario, should the Administrative Board vote to reject the Discernment Team's recommendation for disaffiliation then Florence First UMC would remain a United Methodist congregation and a church-wide vote would not be necessary.

It is important to note that church-wide votes are only required by local congregations when a church is seeking to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. If the elected leadership of the local church (Administrative Board) votes in favor of a recommendation to remain a United Methodist Congregation, then a church-wide vote is not necessary as no change is being made.

8. How will the Discernment Team share the information they gather from the congregation as a whole?

The Discernment Team will remain committed to providing the congregation with up-to-date, relevant, and clear information as it becomes available. We remain committed to this along with full transparency throughout the discernment process.

The first survey asked those completing it to categorize themselves based on their viewpoint and ability to worship with those that hold different viewpoints. While the statements defining the categories below do not capture the full nuance of how individuals read, understand and interpret holy scripture, they are helpful in providing United Methodists some context as to how we individually interact with holy scripture.

As we continue the discernment process, we strongly encourage you to read the statements aligned with each category below and prayerfully consider which one of these best describes how you read, understand and interpret the Gospel story. Again, these do not capture all the nuances perfectly so please prayerfully consider which one most closely describes you and how you approach scripture.

The categories are as follows:

- Progressive Non-Compatibilists: *"If others do not share my progressive view of this issue/scripture, I do not know if we can be in the same church. The practices and policies of every church in the denomination should align with my interpretation of scripture."*
- Progressive Compatibilists: *"If others can respect different views, including my progressive view of this issue/scripture, we can be in the same church. I can be in a denomination where the practices and policies of other churches may reflect different interpretations of scripture."*
- Traditional Compatibilists: *"If others can respect different views, including my traditional view of this issue/scripture, we can be in the same church. I can be in a denomination where the practices and policies of other churches may reflect different interpretations of scripture."*
- Traditional Non-Compatibilists: *"If others do not share my traditional view of this issue/scripture, I do not know if we can be in the same church. The practices and policies of every church in the denomination should align with my interpretation of scripture."*

9. What can we do to be helpful to the Discernment Team?

Several things:

- a) Pray for the Discernment Team as a group, and each individual on the team.
- b) Pray for Florence First UMC, and pray that we may have the wisdom and courage to discern and be who God is calling us to be.
- c) Become informed, not just by groups that you agree with, but truly informed, recognizing that human error and sin in the form of gossip and judgment often create pain and division.
- d) Pray for our LGBTQ members, because they are in a place of feeling like the church is voting on whether they are welcome in this church.
- e) Listen to people who think differently than you. This is how we grow in our understanding. The ability to respect people who think differently than we do is part of what makes a person and church strong and wise. When we can only listen to people we agree with, then we are often feeling insecure in our beliefs.
- f) Pray for unity, not uniformity.
- g) Pray that we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Methodist Connection

The United Methodist Church is a global denomination consisting of 131 Annual Conferences and over 12 million people. The North Alabama Conference of the UMC is made up of over 600 churches and over 100,000 members across north Alabama.

Globally, the United Methodist Church is in mission to 136 countries across the world, with 677 missionaries, 125,000 volunteers in mission, and 550 refugee and relief workers. The UMC provides an average of \$6.3 billion dollars in generosity and outreach annually.

North Alabama Conference FAQs (see also, <https://www.umcna.org/faq-north-alabama-conference-and-bishop>)

1. Are many churches in the North Alabama Conference leaving the UMC?

There are many churches in the discernment process, but being in the discernment process does not mean a church is leaving the UMC. Two examples of churches that have concluded their discernment processes are Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church and Trinity United Methodist

Church in Homewood, Alabama. Vestavia Hills UMC voted on Sunday, November 13, 2022, to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church and become an independent congregation while Trinity UMC's Church Council voted on Monday, November 14, 2022, to remain a United Methodist congregation.

A Called Special Session of the North Alabama Conference has been set for December 10, 2022, to process current requests from congregations for disaffiliation, and we expect to receive the list of congregations requesting disaffiliation per Discipline ¶2553 in early December. Another Called Special Session of the North Alabama Conference has been set for May 11, 2023, to process additional requests from congregations at that time, and a third special session could be called prior to the expiration of Discipline ¶2553 on December 31, 2023.

2. Are all the churches that are leaving joining the Global Methodist Church?

No. Some are joining other expressions of Methodism and some are becoming independent churches.

3. If a church decides to leave, is there a cost?

The simple answer is, yes. Each conference appears to be handling the cost of leaving differently. In the North Alabama Conference, a church needs to go through a discernment process, fund its unfunded pension liabilities, and pay its apportionments.

4. What decisions are being made within the North Alabama Conference at this time to insure a healthy environment for all churches?

The North Alabama Conference has committed to the following leading up to the 2024 General Conference:

- a) We continue to follow our polity as defined in the Book of Discipline.
- b) We will not demonize one another over differing beliefs.
- c) We will never seek to punish or coerce, financially or otherwise, for a spirit-led decision to disaffiliate or remain.
- d) We will respect existing convictions and views, including during the appointment process.

Here is a video that you may find helpful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCW60ZZ8P2E>

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The United Methodist Church worldwide FAQs

What is listed below is from an article entitled, *Is the United Methodist Church Really...* from the UMC.org website regarding The United Methodist Church worldwide...

Is the United Methodist Church Really....

1. Splitting at this time?

No. The term “split” applies when there is a negotiated agreement within the denomination to divide assets and resources. No such agreement has been made in The United Methodist Church. The earliest point at which such an agreement could be made would be at the next General Conference to be held in 2024.

A more accurate term, as suggested by the Rev. William Lawrence, retired dean of Perkins School of Theology and former member of the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, is “splintering.” What is happening is that some traditionalist leaders have decided to create their own denomination (the Global Methodist Church). Leaders of that denomination and other unofficial advocacy groups, such as the Wesleyan Covenant Association, which created it, are encouraging like-minded United Methodist congregations and clergy to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and join their denomination instead.

2. Asking traditionalists to leave the denomination?

No. The requests for disaffiliations are coming largely from traditionalists. Keith Boyette, former president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association and now leader of the Global Methodist Church, describes the reasons he and other leaders are asking traditionalists to leave beginning at 13:32 in this video.

3. About to alter its doctrine to deny the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus?

Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or salvation through Christ alone?

No. All of these positions are bedrock in the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church, more specifically in the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith. These cannot be altered without a two-thirds vote of the General Conference followed by a three-fourths aggregate approval of all annual conferences of The United Methodist Church worldwide. There is no basis to conclude such majorities can be achieved to alter the Articles and Confession for any reason.

Here is what the Articles and Confession say on these matters. And will continue to say.

Virgin Birth and Divinity of Jesus

Articles of Religion, Article II:

“The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.”

Confession of Faith, Article II:

“We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Articles of Religion, Article III:

“Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he returns to judge all men at the last day.

Confession of Faith, Article II:

"Jesus Christ... was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return."

Salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ

Articles of Religion, Article IX:

“We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith.”

Confession of Faith, Article IX:

“We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. Intending to change the Bible?

No. The United Methodist Church has no official translation of the Bible and has never sought to alter the Bible at all. United Methodists have always had a variety of views about how to interpret specific passages of Scripture and likely always will.

5. Allowing congregations that exit the denomination to continue to offer the same pension and health benefits programs to their clergy and staff?

No. The Book of Discipline does not permit non-UMC entities to be plan sponsors of the Clergy Retirement Security Program. Only a General Conference can change this. Churches that disaffiliate will face changes to the benefits they can offer their clergy. Individual congregations and clergy that join the Global Methodist Church (GMC) will be eligible to participate in a retirement plan offered by the GMC, which will be a Wespath defined-contribution retirement plan similar to a United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP).

Elders and deacons who withdraw under Discipline ¶360 will have all assets accrued in CRSP and previous programs in which they may have participated (defined benefit and defined

contribution) converted into a cash equivalent and placed into their United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP). Future retirement plan contributions may be made to the new retirement plan described above which, like UMPIP, is a personal retirement account subject to the effects of the stock market and other investments on its value.

Nor, at this time, is it possible for *individual congregations* (whether in the Global Methodist Church or in the UMC) to be plan sponsors for the HealthFlex health insurance programs Wespath offers unless a congregation has more than 50 eligible employees. United Methodist annual conferences are the plan sponsors for congregations with fewer than 50 eligible employees. This means individual congregations with fewer than 50 eligible employees currently participating in these programs that exit The United Methodist Church at this time can no longer offer these benefits to their clergy and employees effective with the date of disaffiliation. Clergy currently covered by HealthFlex, whether they disaffiliate or not, are eligible to continue on the health insurance plan by paying 100% of the costs themselves for up to 18 months. At that point, the HealthFlex plan is no longer available to them. Individual congregations and clergy who join the Global Methodist Church may participate in the health benefits selected by the Global Methodist Church, which may include HealthFlex.

Summary of January 5, 2023, Prayer and Discernment Team Meeting

The Prayer and Discernment Team met on January 5, 2023. In attendance were members of the team: Steve White, Ann Lyndon, Katy Beth Carr, Paula Michael, Gary Jester, Terry Buchanan, Mak Knowlden, Terry Stubblefield, Calvin Durham, Lindsey Davis, and Dale Cohen. Steve White chaired the meeting.

Terry Stubblefield opened the meeting with prayer.

Lindsey Davis followed with a devotional which included a Scripture reading from Luke 11:14-20 and Psalms 133:1 for the team's reflection.

The team discussed the status of the survey information. The team also discussed how best to provide the information from the survey to the congregation. The team unanimously agreed to the inclusion of the summary of the results and information gleaned from the survey being made available on the Discernment Team page. The information gleaned from the survey will be utilized to guide the team further in discernment.

The team then moved on to a discussion as to the inclusion of frequently asked questions. Prior to the meeting, the team members had submitted various questions and answers, which they suggested be presented on the Discernment Page for the congregation's consideration. The team then carefully and extensively reviewed and edited all of the questions and answers submitted and made appropriate revisions with input from all team members present. The team agreed that the questions would be revised, as agreed, and submitted for consideration by the congregation. The FAQs will be available on the Discernment Page.

The team then discussed the upcoming speakers, which include the Bishop Deborah Wallace-Padgett on January 29 (who will also preach at the 8:15 and 11:00 services) and Brian Ericson and Vaughn Stafford on February 5, 2023. The team agreed that questions should be submitted prior to the dates set for the speakers. All team members will encourage their Sunday School classes, and other small groups in which they participate, to submit questions for consideration for presenters as well as to attend these presentations.

Team members have also been assigned to facilitate the video presentations, which are to begin on January 9 and continue for 6 weeks. Presentations will be held at 10:00 am on Mondays and 6:00 pm on Wednesdays. At least 2 team members will be present to facilitate each session.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2023 at 6 pm. The team will continue to pray deeply for the team and our church.

The meeting was closed with prayer by Dale Cohen.