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October 21, 2022

Dear Church Family,

Over the last several weeks, our Leadership Team has become aware of growing concern within our membership about the future of The United Methodist Church. Many members have strongly encouraged the Leadership Team to address this concern and allow our congregation to consider the available options. Upon learning and reflecting on the information and choices available for this conversation, the Leadership Team wanted to offer a caring and fair process for all our members. It was deemed essential that our church family could discuss their concerns about the future of The United Methodist Church without bringing division to our congregation.

With much prayer and consideration, our Leadership Team determined to enter a formal period of discernment, utilizing the fair process guidelines adopted by the 2021 Arkansas Annual Conference. Yesterday, the decision to enter this formal period of discernment was unanimous amongst the members of our Leadership Team, and we have notified our District Superintendent of the desire to begin the period of formal discernment.

As we move forward in this process, we want to be clear on what this means and doesn't mean:

First, we would like to make clear that our Leadership Team has made no decision to leave the United Methodist Church. Our Leadership Team does not have this authority. There is an approved process for disaffiliation outlined in paragraph 2553 of The Book of Discipline, which permits local congregations to disaffiliate from the UMC. This formal time of discernment enables a church's professing membership to discern whether they wish to remain a UMC congregation, disaffiliate to become an independent congregation or unite with another denomination.

Secondly, this period of discernment will take no less than 90 days. It will include a series of at least three listening sessions where anyone who wishes to attend may do so to learn more about the issues that have brought about this time of discernment. At the end of the time of discernment, a straw poll will be taken amongst our members to register their preference regarding the future of this church and its affiliation with the UMC.

Third, when this period of formal discernment concludes, should there be sufficient support for a change in the church's affiliation, the church may hold a church conference where all professing members of the church will be able to vote on the future of the local church as it relates to the UMC. If the membership decides to disaffiliate, the church's next step is determining its future affiliation or independence. The next steps, if necessary, are a separate decision.

This is a significant time in the life of our congregation, and we pray that you will make plans to attend the three listening sessions. We are working on the dates for these meetings, which will be shared with you as soon as possible. Several of our Leadership Team members will be available after worship on Sunday, October 23, to answer questions you may have. May we treat one another with Christian love, even when we disagree, and may we join in prayer for one another and our church as we prayerfully consider how God is leading us in this process.

Rev. John Embrey  
Pastor

Phil Bunch  
Chair

Gabe Roberts  
Vice-Chair

Toni Bell  
Lay Leader