

PUMC DISCERNMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

June 26, 2024

Thank you for your question submissions. The first 3 pages are the most frequently asked questions to date. Other questions we have received anonymously will follow those as we are able. If you do not see the answer to your question here or in the other information on the website, please let us know at questions@pumcfortmill.org.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS

1. As a member of PUMC, what is my role in this process?

As a member of PUMC Fort Mill, you have a vital role in the discernment process. While the discernment team has been entrusted by Church Council to present our members with facts regarding the state of the UMC church and financial ramifications if separation is chosen, it is up to each individual member to make an informed decision on where they align. It is important that as a member you are participating in a time of prayer and reflection during this discernment period, as well as attending listening sessions and participating in the church conference, once that date is established by the district superintendent. We ask that you engage in respectful conversations with fellow members and truly listen to one another. We ask that you take the time to click on the resources provided and read the information to be informed and prepared to make a personal determination based on facts and not generalizations or assumptions.

2. What is the discernment process? What do we hope to gain as a congregation through this process?

As taken from "A Faithful Step Forward" by the SC Conference:

To ensure congregations are equipped to make decisions that enable them to best live into their disciple-making mission, South Carolina Conference leaders have adopted a process through which a local church can discern whether it will continue in ministry within The United Methodist Church or separate from the denomination.

The Local Church Discernment Process is designed to help local churches determine whether they can function as a United Methodist church if they firmly believe that the denomination has not consistently upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality. It will provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue, to allow every voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard, and to discern the congregation's sentiment regarding separation.

Find the rest of this article and Local Discernment FAQs, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/discern/>

We pray for Holy Spirit to be with our church and guide us to our next steps. We hope to gain clarity with regards to whether or not our congregation supports the changes made to the UMC Book of Discipline and Social Principles during the General Conference held May 2024, and if this congregation wishes to continue as a United Methodist Church. The Discernment Team has scheduled two Informational, three Listening Sessions and three Prayer Services through August 11th. Please refer to our calendar on the website.

3. Please make clear the voting process. Who will be allowed to vote? What about those older shut-in members who can no longer get out?

The process as set out by the Conference is that our District Superintendent or their designee shall preside over a Church Conference where the vote of to pursue or not to pursue separation from the

UMC shall be by paper/written ballot. The ballots will be counted in the presence of all those in attendance, and the report of the vote announced before the Church Conference is adjourned. The decision to separate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote. Only professing members that are present at the Church Conference will be allowed to vote. There are not concessions for shut-ins, persons out of town on business or any other reasons for not being able to attend the vote. Persons will be asked to check in and will only be given a ballot if they are on the church's professing member list. Membership audits are performed yearly prior to each Annual Charge Conference. If there is a question regarding membership, please contact Denise in the church office, 803-548-0102.

4. How will the information be communicated? Will all critical information be sent in hard copy?

With over 300 mailing addresses, it is not financially practical to mail an update every time a decision is made so we ask that members be engaged and proactive in obtaining information. The Discernment Team will be giving weekly updates at the end of each service and updates will be published in the newsletter. Meetings are listed in the bulletin at least 3 weeks prior. There will be an email sent one week before each meeting. The meeting dates will be on social media as well. A tab called "Discernment" has been created on the church website (pumcfortmill.org) where information will be added as obtained. Informational meetings and listening sessions will be recorded and posted on the website. We will mail a postcard with notification of the final informational meeting and the Church Conference date. Please call the office, 803-548-0102, to confirm contact information or to request a hard copy of materials.

5. Will the costs associated with disaffiliation be shared with the congregation?

As stated by the Local Discernment Process of the South Carolina Conference:

During the discernment process, the church council shall gather and present to the congregation all costs and requirements included in the Agreement to Separate.

We are currently obtaining all the information to be able to provide a reasonable estimate. It will be presented at or before the August 11th meeting. Below are the Conference requirements for church separation:

- A tithe equal to 10 percent of the appraised value of all church property and liquid assets.
- All unpaid apportionment giving for the prior year, as well as for the year of closure up to the date of the Annual Conference vote to close the church.
- An additional 12 months of apportionment giving.
- All unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy appointed to the church.
- A withdrawal liability equal to the church's proportional share of any unfunded pension obligations.
- Other financial considerations and legal liabilities of the local church – such as the disposition of any debts, loans, leases, endowments, foundations, and cemeteries – must be satisfied or transferred to a new entity.

6. Is there a deadline for the discernment process?

The discernment process must be a period of at least 30 days. The PUMC Church Council set our discernment timeframe from June 15, 2024 to August 15, 2024. We are awaiting notification from our District Superintendent as to the date of our Church Conference (voting meeting). Any vote to separate must be made by March 1, 2025. The SC Conference is removing the Local Discernment Process at Annual Conference 2025.

DOCTRINE

1. Can you provide a consolidated list of all changes to the book of discipline and social principles decided through General Conference including previous and current language?

The United Methodist Church's governing body, the General Conference (GC) met in May 2024 and made changes to the UMC Book of Discipline and Social Principles. During the 10 days, delegates considered more than 1,000 petitions.

We ask for your patience while the Discernment Team works together to develop a list of the most asked about changes. Meanwhile, we urge you to consult the resources given on our website. The following link is a good start <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-the-umc-really-is-series>

A preface: The United Methodist Church is forging a new identity beginning with actions taken at the 2020/2024 General Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina (April 23-May 3, 2024). This series will explore in some detail what elements of this new identity are already in effect, which will go into effect in January 2025, and what will go into effect beginning in late spring 2026 should 31 proposed constitutional amendments be ratified by the annual conferences in the coming months."

2. Does our church have to accept the new discipline guidelines?

The Book of Discipline is a fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work, and procedures of The United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline sets forth the plan by which we United Methodists govern ourselves. It reflects our understanding of the Church and of what is expected of its laity and clergy as they seek to be effective witnesses in the world as a part of the whole body of Christ.

The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions.

As a UMC, we are bound to the Book of Discipline as approved at each General Conference and we are to use the Social Principles as guidelines.

3. What is the pastor appointment process, and will we be allowed to decline a pastor based on their sexual orientation?

The SC Conference itinerate system for pastoral changes provides our Staff Parish Relations Team (SPRT) the opportunity to consult with the District Superintendent (DS) to learn the specific needs of the church and review an incoming pastor's profile. In the past, this consultation included questions about a pastor's credentials such as elder, deacon, or local pastor as well as local church acceptance based on gender and race. The Bishop and the Cabinet make final approval of pastor appointments and do not want to put a pastor in any church where they cannot be loved and supported. Only the SC Bishop, Cabinet and DS will have the exact answers to the specifics about how it all will work going forward. It will be up to our SPRT, who take guidance from the congregation, to convey to the DS the willingness of this church body to accept or decline a pastor based on sexual orientation.