

First United Methodist Church of Gadsden  
115 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street

July 26, 2022

Dear Church Family,

Over the last few years, we have lived through some very difficult times! We have seen a once-in-a-hundred-years global pandemic (which is still a challenge for us today). We are also living through a once-in-every-fifty-years change in our denomination, The United Methodist Church. Many of you, like me, were “Methodist” before we became The United Methodist Church in 1968. We adjusted then, and we will face the future together, with the help of God!

You may have heard a lot about what our denomination is going through. On the other hand, you may have heard very little. In the absence of the “plain facts,” rumors abound. These are the “plain facts” about the process GFUMC will be going through in the coming weeks. I hope that everyone will be diligent in praying our way forward, and that everyone will take full advantage of the opportunities to learn more. Here is our timeline:

Pathways for our Future – July 6 – Oct. 6 - 2022

Phase 1 – AWARENESS (Prayer, Listening, and Learning)

- A. Conduct a church-wide survey (enclosed with this letter) to discover what congregation wants to know – starting July 26, 2022 (after Bd. of Stewards approval).
- B. Put together a task force to help gather information – (made up of 6 people – 3 who are leaning toward disaffiliation from the UMC, and 3 who are leaning toward staying UMC, chaired by Mark Condra – Bd. of Stewards chair) starting July 26, 2022 (after Bd. of Stewards approval).
- C. Special Pathways Speaker #1 – Aug 21, 6:00 pm... Rev. Monica Harbarger, Director of United Counseling, will speak to us about how to communicate with each other *gracefully* and *respectfully* despite differences. The presentation will be in our sanctuary and live-streamed.
- D. Special Pathways Speaker #2 – Aug 28 – 6:00 pm in sanctuary (either “for” or “against” disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church – speaker chosen by the task force)
- E. Special Pathways Speaker #3 – Sept 11 – 6:00 pm in sanctuary (either “for” or “against” disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church – the different point of view from the last speaker – again, speaker chosen by the task force).
- F. Classes and information provided as requested via survey will be offered throughout August and September by either the task force or pastors.

## Phase 2 – ASSESSMENT (Prayer, Fasting)

- A. Call to church-wide Daily Prayer and Weekly Fasting – Sept. 11 – Oct. 6
- B. Listening Sessions will be offered by the pastors and/or task force during this time

## Phase 3 – ACTION (Straw Poll for discernment, and if necessary, Church Conference)

- A. On Sunday, Sept. 18, at 6:00 pm, the church will gather for worship, prayer, and a straw poll for discernment will be taken. This straw poll will give us the information we need to move forward. If the poll shows that there is **NOT** a 2/3 majority that wishes to disaffiliate, no further action would be needed at this time. In other words, no Church Conference would be needed. Gadsden First would move forward, remaining affiliated with the UMC.
- B. If there **IS** a 2/3 majority who express a desire in straw poll to disaffiliate from the UMC, a notice would be sent out immediately to *all full members* of Gadsden FUMC inviting them to take part in a Church Conference, which would take place on Sunday, Oct. 9, at 6:00 pm. The Church Conference would be led by our District Superintendent – Rev. Jeff Davis. This would be an *official* vote, and if GFUMC voted at Church Conference by 2/3 majority to disaffiliate from the UMC, it could do so - under Par. 2553 of the Book of Discipline. Remember, only full members (verified by the Membership Secretary) who are *present at the time of the vote* would be eligible to vote at Church Conference.

(This process was approved by D.S., Rev. Jeff Davis, on July 22)

What should we do now? Three things: (1) Pray every day for your church! Pray for your pastors, staff, and lay leadership. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help us discern the wisest way forward. (2) Be sure and fill out the survey (on paper or online) and let us know what information you need. (3) Participate fully in the Pathways process, and ask your pastors or task force members, any questions you might have. Our doors are always open to you.

Grace and peace,



Pastor Sam

# FUMC Gadsden Member Survey

7/26/22

We value your opinion.

The purpose of this survey is to determine what members want to know about the changes in our denomination, the decisions GFUMC will be making in the fall of 2022 and about the advantages or disadvantages of either voting to stay UMC or to disaffiliate from the denomination.

Email \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Check the items for which you would like more information.

\_\_\_\_\_ The process and timeline for disaffiliation from the UMC if the church voted to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_ The process and timeline for staying UMC if the church voted to do so

\_\_\_\_\_ Costs and affiliation options for GFUMC if the church voted to leave the UMC

\_\_\_\_\_ What does the current Book of Discipline for the UMC say about homosexuality?

\_\_\_\_\_ Why are we voting at this time?

\_\_\_\_\_ How different Methodists interpret biblical references to homosexuality

\_\_\_\_\_ The impact of staying UMC vs. disaffiliation on the appointment process for receiving ministers.

## 2. What other information would be helpful to you?

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Full Name and Email (optional)

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This survey is available to complete online <https://forms.gle/itKvoHZAMsA5kV8S7>