

Greetings Church Family,

As many of you know, First United Methodist Church of Stanton officially voted to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church denomination at a called Church Conference yesterday evening, Tuesday, September 27th. The vote to disaffiliate required a $\frac{2}{3}$ ^{rd's} majority, 84.7% of votes received were in favor of disaffiliation. The official disaffiliation date from the United Methodist Church will be January 1, 2023.

I want to say thank you for the way our church handled the vote and the love and care shown for one another. Having to go through something like this with a church family is tough, even if the result of the vote went as you hoped. Right now is the time for us to reach out to one another, check in on each other, and pray for one another and our church.

Some have already asked me about what our next steps will and what else we will have to do. Our Board of Trustees and Administrative Council will be working to ensure the legal requirements are fulfilled. The Northwest Texas Annual Conference will be assisting us in this as well. Over the next few months, our congregation will be discerning the next step for our church. The Administrative Council voted on and approved a 6 month discernment period. The Ad. Council believed it would be best for the congregation to wait a short period of time before deciding upon the next step forward. I completely agree with them on this.

Over the next 6 months, we will have the opportunity to learn more about the options for our church, which are: 1) joining another Methodist/Wesleyan Denomination such as the Global Methodist Church, The Wesleyan Church, The Free Methodist Church, or The Church of the Nazarene, 2) remain Independent and join with an association of other independent Methodist churches, or 3) remain Independent and unconnected. Each of these choices have associated pros and cons. This discernment period will end and we will conduct an "Affiliation Vote" on our next step by March 22, 2023. From January 1, 2023 until the "Affiliation Vote" we will technically be an independent local church.

Church Family, now that the logistics of this has been explained, I think it is important to acknowledge that many of us are going through a mixture of emotions ranging from sadness, grieved, and anxious to relieved, peaceful, and hopeful. Many of us have only experienced faith and church as a United Methodist. It is okay to grieve the loss of this identity, even if you were in favor of disaffiliation. It is my prayer that you will experience God's peace, comfort, and hope through these emotions. If anyone

would like to talk, cry, be upset, or have questions, please do not hesitate to come by the office and see me or call me. My cell phone number is 813-388-0121.

As we move forward, our mission, main focus, and the vast majority of our attention and effort are going to be the same they have always been: Sharing the Good News and making new disciples of Jesus Christ by celebrating God's presence, demonstrating God's love, communicating God's word, and educating God's people. It is our shared belief in Jesus Christ that unifies the church and as we maintain our focus on the mission of sharing God's love, we will maintain and strengthen the unity of our church family.

Over the next few months, caring for one another and worshiping with one another will be vitally important as we continue to trust in God's provision and guidance as we move forward. I trust and believe in God's promise in Romans 8:28, "we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." I believe God will bring not just good things as we move forward together, but will bring great and amazing things as we continue to live in God's purpose and will for our church.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Bobby