

Please note: We received too many questions that deserve in depth answers to address in 60 minutes. We will do our best in the panel format. The DTF has spent hours reading and researching for every single question submitted. We will discuss as many questions as time permits each Wednesday night. We will post more detailed answers on our DOF website.

Some of your questions were very similar in nature and some have been combined, so you might not see your exact wording. The DTF clarified the questions asked as a group. The DTF reviewed collaborative answers provided by DTF members, clergy and others to ensure the responses were balanced.

If anyone has any questions, comments or suggestions, please email the Discernment Taskforce at Taskforce@FirstShreveport.org. We respectfully ask that you refrain from contacting any members of the Discernment Taskforce individually.

A. The Discernment Team has created the same opportunities for all persons to hear and participate, ask questions and request meetings or discussions with the DTF. All people are welcome in our church and all events. Every person is of sacred worth

A. The rhetoric from leading centrists and most of the Council of Bishops has been to finally pass the "One Church Plan" concept at GC 2024, which redefines marriage as between any two people and removes all prohibitions regarding same sex marriage as it relates to weddings and ordination. If a substantial number of traditional delegates (including international) exit the denomination, it is unknown what other social principles might be altered over time. For instance, in the aftermath of the recent Dobbs Decision by the US Supreme Court, most public comments from centrist and progressives, including the President of the Council of Bishops, lean pro-choice instead of the current Discipline's pro-life leaning on abortion. Other social principles may be subject to similar shifting ideologically over time. The official theological doctrine of the church is difficult to change without constitutional amendments, but the UMC has from time to time altered its suggested interpretive framework. It will likely be pluralistic in its interpretive scope, ie "Big Tent."

A. Please watch the Task Force presentation (video and powerpoint available) on the Discerning Our Future Website.

B. Optional Paths – Two-step process

Step 1 – Using the discernment process we are now working our way through we will have a chance to vote as a congregation on whether or not to remain UM or to disaffiliate. This is the decision at hand. If we decide to remain UM (i.e., not disaffiliate), we stop there. Only if we decide to disaffiliate, do we move to Step 2.

Step 2 - Would involve a second discernment process where we will decide on a path forward with regard to denominational affiliation. All options will be explored during this second discernment period. At this point, we believe the options would be:

- a. Remain independent.
- b. Align with a newly formed Global Methodist Church.
- c. Align with any number of other Wesleyan-based Methodist denominations in the US – Congregational Methodist Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, Methodist Protestant Church, and many others.

We will have plenty of options to consider.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves by talking about Step 2. Only if we elect to disaffiliate will we launch into Step 2 and during this period, we will perform all necessary due-diligence on how to align going forward.

It should be noted here that if we elect to remain a UM congregation, we will then take a wait and see approach – wait to see what happens at the 2024 General Conference and beyond. At any point, if we decide that we can't live with the UMC's trajectory, we can still disaffiliate but, if we do, it will likely be without the protections now provided under Para 2553 which limit our financial obligations to somewhere around \$1.3M. After Para 2553 expires, our exit costs could be much higher, but we just do not know.

A. One of the problems in the UMC is that we use many of the same words, but we mean very different things. Traditional Wesleyans view all of scripture as "authoritative" and there are nuanced "interpretive" strategies within. Centrist and Progressives tend to "interpret" which scriptures are "authoritative" and which are more historical in nature. All Methodists claim to take the Bible seriously, but these different approaches to the Bible yield widely different outcomes.

A. Yes. Our church will remain a Methodist congregation that takes care of our pastors and staff. Yes, we will remain Bible-based. Our church has always looked to the Bible as the inspired word of God and we will remain true to that.

- A. We will support all clergy and staff. No clergy would be forced to leave.
- B. Our church is fortunate to have such a devoted clergy and staff and the financial resources to continue to support them, regardless of our decision.

A. Our focus is on Discernment during these 40 days. So future affiliation options may or may not be addressed in the future.

A. FUMCS would remain in the UMC.

A. Clergy members have to be careful with what they say. Pastors perceived as leading their congregation toward disaffiliation have been seen as breaking covenant with the annual conference. This varies by conference. Our pastors are making every effort to remain nonbiased and to be a pastor to every member of the congregation.

A. ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." - John 14:6 NIV
SUPPLEMENTAL RESEARCH DOCUMENT on Truth posted with the 9/14/22 Q&A document on the DOF website.

A. Yes. The Discernment Task Force has set our official time of Discernment to last 40 days (September 7 – October 16). Then the Church council will meet, IF they decide to proceed with 2553 at that point, THEN there would be an in person church wide vote within 120 days of their meeting. (This all church meeting is scheduled by the DS).

A. Local missions: Many of these organizations listed are already losing money quickly, so no matter the decisions, I think they will always struggle for money – just as most not for profit groups do. I would say that, as METHODISTS not necessarily only UNITED METHODISTS, choices could be made by individual churches as well as old and new organizations to continue support. As far our church, Ashley and Michelle run our local and global missional programs very autonomous of what the conference prescribes. They are pretty unique. We already support groups that are affiliated with other denominations: ie Catholic Charities, Hope House (Episcopal), etc. These can and should continue no matter the name on the logo.

Global missions: When FUMC made the commitment to expand its global missions ministry in 2013, we did so without limitations of partnership in the United Methodist Church. As such, we, as a church, are in covenant relationship with ten families across the world. One of those families holds membership in the United Methodist Church, one holds membership in the Evangelical Methodist Church, and the others span across other denominations. These families serve a variety of people and cultures all over the world, and most would describe their theology as "orthodox", "conservative", or "traditional." When Dr. Ashley Goad met with the global mission partners at their retreat in July 2022, they asked about the ongoing concerns in the United Methodist Church and what the future of our relationship would be with them. While they respect the current discipline, a "progressive" change to the current Book of discipline would be problematic for most of them.

A. Yes

A. Yes. There will be opportunities to support seminaries and support development of future ministers.

The short answer is yes. There are two primary reasons that SOME UMC pastors (and other non-umc pastors) believe this.

The first reason is that God's love provides an avenue home for everyone. In this theological construct, God's love doesn't allow anyone to go to hell. Because they believe that "Love Wins" there isn't a consequence for those who don't believe, eventually God loves everyone to Heaven.

The second reason is that some UMC pastors believe that Jesus is a way to heaven, but not the exclusive way. They take a broad brush perspective of heaven and other religions. There are other religions, they believe, that also give direction to God and offer a way of salvation.

A. Bishops are charged with unity for the UMC.

A. FUMC Shreveport views all people as individuals of sacred worth. Therefore, self-identified LGBTQIA+ persons have been welcomed, are welcomed now and will continue to be welcomed and invited to participate in worship as lay congregants or in ministry programs as lay participants.

Just as we have always done, we will continue to extend welcome, grace, and respect to all who call FUMC Shreveport their church home and all people seeking a relationship with Christ.

John chapter 8 tells the story of a woman accused of adultery. The Pharisees brought her to Jesus to see if he would follow the law of Moses which commanded her to be stoned. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. When finished, he straightens up and said "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." They dropped their stones and left, and Jesus asked the woman "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir" she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus did not agree with this woman, but he loved her. He did not condone what she did, but he did not condemn her either. I pray that we have the grace to follow his example.

There are many advantages and disadvantages of both staying UMC and disaffiliating. These are presented in the presentation given by the DTF in our first introductory meeting. These are available on the website and I encourage you to have a look.