

June 28, 2022

Dear Church Council Member,

As requested by the Strategic Planning Team, please be advised that we will convene a meeting of the Church Council at 6:00 PM on Tuesday, July 12, 2022 on the third floor of the E & A Building in the Multi-Media Room. The purpose of this meeting will be to vote on whether-or-not to **BEGIN** an official "Discernment" process on disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church. We will be following guidelines approved by the Louisiana Annual Conference relative to paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline (2019).

Your presence and participation in this **VERY IMPORTANT** meeting will be greatly appreciated. As representatives of our congregation in the highest governing body of First United Methodist Church of Shreveport we ask that you thoughtfully pray for God's guidance and wisdom prior to attending the meeting. Please contact Anna Beth acrowson@firstshreveport.org or the church office at 424-7771 to reserve your box meal. Thank you for your service and commitment.

Sincerely,



Jerry Montgomery,
Church Council Chairman

Resolution 2

- The Church Council of First United Methodist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana, authorizes the Strategic Planning Team, Staff Executive Team, and FUMC of Shreveport, LA Disciplinary Committee Chairpersons to organize and deploy a Discernment Taskforce to develop activities and timelines to educate our congregation in the process of discernment, discussion, prayer and education regarding the future of FUMC Shreveport, LA.
- Please circle one: Yes No

November 3, 2022

Rev. Dr. Tom Dolph
Superintendent, Shreveport and Monroe Districts
Louisiana Conference, UMC
2911 Centenary Blvd
Centenary College
Hamilton Hall, Rm 214
Shreveport, LA 71104

Rev. Dr. Dolph,

After much prayer and reflection, the Church Council of FUMC Shreveport met on November 2, 2022 and during that meeting voted (by a vote of 43 to 7 with 1 abstention) to (a) explore disaffiliation with the United Methodist Church pursuant to Book of Discipline Paragraph 2553, and (b) request a church conference pursuant to Paragraph 2553. A copy of the Resolution approved by the Church Administrative Council is enclosed.

In accordance with Paragraph 2553, and with Book of Discipline Paragraph 248, we hereby request that you call and schedule a church conference for the purpose of considering the question of Paragraph 2553 disaffiliation. That is, we request that you call a FUMC Shreveport church conference to vote upon the question of whether the members of the church, after due discernment, wish to disaffiliate from the UMC denomination for reasons of conscience, including as per 2553(1) "... reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow."

In accordance with Paragraph 2553(4), we further request that you itemize for us any and all monetary amounts that would be due to the Annual Conference in connection with our possible disaffiliation, and in particular any apportionment, unfunded pension obligation, or other amounts that the Annual Conference would expect to be paid.

Thank you for your patience, understanding, and courtesies as we begin our period of discernment. Please let us know if you need any additional information from us in order to properly convene or schedule the requested church conference. Please also share any information that we will need to properly evaluate our options and the path forward. We look forward to hearing from you and working amicably with you towards whatever resolution may prevail.

We are, Sincerely, and in Christ,

Church Council of First United Methodist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana


Jerry Montgomery
Chairman, Church Council


Mike Vasko
Lay Leader, First United Methodist Church

REV. DAVID R. MELVILLE, ET AL.

* DOCKET NUMBER:

VERSUS

* 19TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
LOUISIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH, SOUTH CENTRAL
JURISDICTION

* EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH

* STATE OF LOUISIANA

AFFIDAVIT

NOW COMES, Rev. Fred B. Wideman, who, after being duly sworn did depose and state that:

(1)

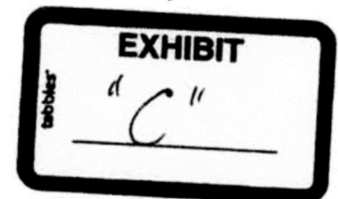
I am Fred B Wideman, clergy in the Louisiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church since 1974. I have served congregations in Pollock, New Orleans, Broadmoor United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, Sulphur, and Ruston, La. I served as a delegate, elected by the Louisiana Annual Conference, to both the General and Jurisdictional Conferences. In 2012, I was a candidate for the episcopacy supported by the Louisiana delegation to the Jurisdictional Conference. I am a voting member of the Louisiana Annual Conference. I retired in 2016 but continue to serve part time as the minister at Lisbon United Methodist Church, located some 10 miles east of Homer, La., near my home.

(2)

Born and raised in Homer, La., I spent much of my years at First United Methodist Church where I was baptized and confirmed. I attended Sunday School, Worship, music programs, even served as summer youth director while in college. I was voted on and approved as a candidate for Ordained Ministry for the United Methodist Church at Homer. Until a recent disaffiliation vote, my charge conference membership was at Homer along with my wife, Ann's, membership. Four generations of my family worshipped there. At the time of the deaths of my parents, my family donated to First United Methodist Church our family home along with 3 acres of land.

(3)

First United Methodist Church, Homer, has recently voted to disaffiliate and is no longer a United Methodist church. All facilities and assets have been given to a newly named church, Cornerstone. The disaffiliation leaves many members disconnected from their home church and denomination along with strained relationships among those formerly considered family.



(4)

From the beginning the process of disaffiliation has been flawed, and filled with unintended consequences which the Louisiana Annual Conference could not have anticipated. The Annual Conference's intent to allow disaffiliation is flawed. Following years of controversy surrounding the church's position on human sexuality, in particular a long-standing statement in the *Discipline* regarding the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals", General Conference in 2019 reinforced the statement against ordination of homosexuals. It added additional penalties to clergy who would participate in the marriage of gay or lesbian couples. This new addition is referred to as "The Traditional Plan." In response to this Traditional Plan, the General Conference offered a brief time for those whose conscience was harmed by the Traditional Plan, to be able to disaffiliate from the denomination. This original intent as shown by the language of the new provision, ¶ 2553, was not for those who voted for the Traditional Plan, to use this narrow opportunity for such a massive and harmful exodus.

(5)

The disaffiliation process is further flawed by its contradictory position to the Gospel's theme of unity in diversity, a bedrock of Methodism through the centuries. The harmful effect of this process is seen in formerly loving congregations broken as members feel forced to fight for property and assets. I have learned of this brokenness from my relationship with members of the churches I have served and from my friends at the Homer church. Despite long-standing disagreements over social issues, it is this present process of disaffiliation that has become the ground for a very painful divorce within our denomination. Congregations have been given a period of time for "discernment" to prepare for a vote. During that time outside groups infiltrated and supplied the membership with information to guide them in their vote. Much of that information was inaccurate and inflammatory. Members of my congregation at Lisbon have been told things that are not true yet it leaves questions in their minds. My job in truth telling goes way beyond my preaching.

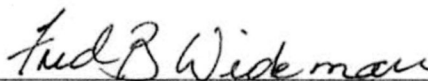
(6)

A third flaw in this process, and a reason I am participating in this action, is how the process wrongfully and, I believe, illegally divests the denomination of valuable buildings and assets. Generations of people have sacrificed for the establishment of these assets for the work of Methodism in Louisiana, and now, at a give-away-price, the Louisiana Annual Conference is allowing a majority vote of present membership of local churches to remove these properties from denominational use. This was never the intent of General Conference. It is now causing great harm. The process should be stopped and sent back to the denomination's General Conference for appropriate changes. Give local congregations time to consider all that this process is fomenting and the unforeseen consequences it brings to churches and local communities.

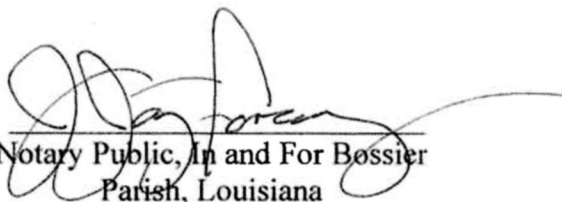
(7)

Having seen in the last year the disaffiliation process at Homer United Methodist Church and based upon my relationships with members of churches I have served in Louisiana that have experienced disaffiliation or are presently in the process for disaffiliation, the Louisiana Annual Conference's allowance for these disaffiliations under ¶ 2553 has caused and is causing great harm to members of local churches.

THUS, DONE and SIGNED on the 3rd day of February, 2023, in Bossier Parish, Louisiana.



Fred B. Wideman



Notary Public, In and For Bossier
Parish, Louisiana

J. Jay Caraway

BAR Roll No. 3867

REV. DAVID R. MELVILLE, ET AL.

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
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* STATE OF LOUISIANA

AFFIDAVIT

NOW COMES, Nancy Smith Walker, who, after being duly sworn did depose and state that:

(1)

I was christened at FUMC – Shreveport making me the 4th generation of my family to be a member of this church and my immediate family now counts 6 generations of continuous membership. I have been an active member most of my life except for the years we lived in cities other than Shreveport and in all those cases I was a member in a local United Methodist Church. I returned to Shreveport in 2000 and once again joined FUMC where I have faithfully served continuously to this date.

(2)

I have been following as a church member over the past year the meetings and discussions at FUMC concerning the possibility of FUMC disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church and the Louisiana Annual Conference.

(3)

I was present at a meeting of the FUMC church council in November, 2022, at which time it was voted by the council to ask the district superintendent, Dr. Tom Dolph, to set a meeting for a FUMC church conference for a vote on the issue of disaffiliation under ¶ 2553 of the Book of Discipline.

(4)

On February 16, 2023, Dr. Dolph sent a letter to the membership of FUMC informing them that the vote of the church conference tentatively scheduled for February 26, 2023, had been delayed.



(5)

Based upon communications from the Annual Conference representatives, I now understand that the rescheduling of the church conference vote at FUMC by Dr. Dolph may be set at any time, giving the membership only a 10-day notice of a newly scheduled vote.

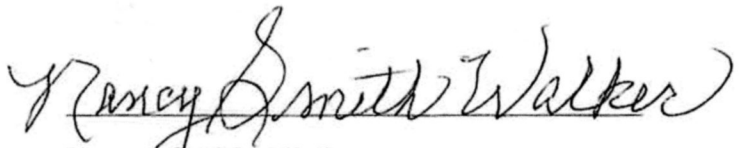
(6)

I believe from the information I have received from FUMC that the continued efforts within FUMC for disaffiliation are not based in any way upon members' beliefs that the current stance of the United Methodist Church against homosexual clergy and gay marriage ceremonies is wrong.

(7)

I have worked against disaffiliation by FUMC, and believe that a quick 10-day setting of a church conference vote by the Annual Conference under the authority of Dr. Dolph would cause further confusion on the matter of FUMC's disaffiliation and impede efforts of those of us working to provide information to the membership concerning the inappropriateness of disaffiliation.

THUS, DONE and SIGNED on the 7th day of March, 2023, in Caddo Parish, Louisiana.


Nancy Smith Walker



Notary Public, In and For
Caddo Parish, Louisiana

CRAIG PROTHRO
NOTARY PUBLIC, ID #77014
CADDO PARISH, LA
MY COMMISSION IS FOR LIFE

From: Anna Beth Crowson <noreply@shelbnextchms.com>
Date: July 8, 2022 at 2:04:22 PM CDT
To: ****
Subject: Church Council Meeting
Reply-To: Anna Beth Crowson <acrowson@fumcshreveport.org>

Greetings FUMC of Shreveport Church Council Member,

This is a reminder of the FUMC of Shreveport Church Council Meeting on Tuesday, July 12, at 6:00 p.m., in the Sanctuary. When you arrive in the Sanctuary, please register your attendance with Lounelle Black, the Church Council Secretary, and receive your ballot for the vote(s) we will take. While all church members are welcome to attend, please note that **ONLY** current Church Council members can vote at the meeting. This includes Church Council Officers, Church Officers, Lay/Reserve Members of the Annual Conference, Class of 2022, Class of 2023, Class of 2024, and Honorary Life Members.

I want to take a brief moment to be clear about the purpose of this Church Council meeting. The purpose **IS NOT** to take a vote to leave the United Methodist Church. Please do not think this is the work we will be doing on Tuesday. The purpose **IS** to discuss and vote on whether or not First United Methodist Church of Shreveport is ready to move into a season of discernment, discussion, prayer, and education in regards to the future of our congregation.

Why hold such a Church Council meeting? It is clear there is much disagreement and division across our denomination. This division stems from multiple issues faced by The United Methodist Church including Theological Issues, Organizational Issues, and Symptomatic Issues. The Symptomatic Issues, Human Sexuality and the Definition of Marriage, are what receive the most airtime, but the issues run much deeper. Whether we like it or not, these issues affect FUMC of Shreveport.

Where did this Church Council meeting originate? In 2018, Dr. Pat Day and our church leadership convened the Strategic Planning Team to help FUMC of Shreveport move through what would be a "rocky" season for the UMC. There was a special-called session of General Conference in 2019, and it seemed as though the UMC would experience a formal separation when General Conference 2020 took place. However, COVID happened, and the 2020 General Conference was postponed to 2021, and then postponed again to 2022. News was released in March, 2022, that the 2022 General Conference would be postponed to 2024. Then the Global Methodist Church launched on May 1, 2022. Since then, and due to all these circumstances (and more), hundreds of churches across our connection have begun seasons of discernment in regard to their

future affiliation.

As Senior Pastor of FUMC of Shreveport, I have remained relatively silent on all these issues. Rather, I have focused my efforts and energy on preaching Jesus Christ, the Bible, and leading our great congregation forward to further obedience and discipleship. But now, a day rarely goes by that a member of our church staff does not receive a question from a church member including "What is going on with the UMC? What is the Global Methodist Church? Are we staying? Are we leaving? Will we take a vote? Will I have a vote? When will this take place? What will it cost? Where do we stand on the issue of homosexuality?", etc. When we asked the congregation to submit questions for our upcoming "You Asked for It" sermon series, much of the feedback received included these very questions, asking our preaching team to address these issues from the pulpit. It seems that silence is no longer an option to the issues facing our greater tradition.

On Monday, June 27, 2022, a meeting of the Strategic Planning Team, Disciplinary Committee Chairpersons, and Staff Executive Team took place. A unanimous vote was received from that team to ask the Church Council of FUMC of Shreveport to convene and vote to move into a season of discernment, discussion, prayer, and education about the issues facing The United Methodist Church, how these issues affect FUMC of Shreveport, and the future of our congregation.

If the Church Council votes on Tuesday to move into a season of discernment, I assure you that we will commit to the integrity of the process with transparency and honesty in a way that brings honor to Jesus Christ and keeps Him at the center. Church members will have multiple opportunities to listen, learn, and be heard. There will be no manipulation or coercion, nor will we live into a preconceived future. This season can also become an opportunity for great excitement, discipleship, and growth for FUMC of Shreveport, and I pray that it will be so through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the nature of our discussions on Tuesday, we are not offering a Zoom option, nor will the meeting be live-streamed. I encourage you, if at all possible, to physically be in the Sanctuary Tuesday, July 12, at 6:00 p.m. Church Council meetings are open to all church members. Please feel free to share this far and wide.

Walk with the King and Be a Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Steven H. Bell, D.Min.
Senior Pastor | FUMC of Shreveport