



UPDATE FROM THE FUMC DISCERNMENT TEAM

With approval and direction from the Committee on Lay Leadership and the Board of Stewards, the Discernment Team ([CLICK HERE FOR TEAM NAMES](#)) held their first meeting on October 16 and second meeting on November 6 to begin a process of praying, inquiring, listening, and evaluating information surrounding issues of human sexuality and The United Methodist Church. Updates on our progress and links to resources can be accessed on our website, in the Link newsletter, and Sunday bulletin. Additionally, questions and suggestions for the Discernment Team are welcomed and can be submitted via this link: [DISCERNMENT TEAM QUESTIONS](#) It is our earnest desire to communicate to the Fairhope UMC family with clarity, transparency, and timeliness, all undergirded with diligent, daily prayer. We invite all to commit with us in praying daily for God's guidance and wisdom.

FAQ REGARDING HUMAN SEXUALITY ISSUES AND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1. What is the charge of the Discernment Team of Fairhope United Methodist Church?

ANSWER:

The purpose of this development is to assemble a diverse group of dedicated church members to serve as representatives in an intentional conversation about the current question of disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. We are asking that the selected nominees be willing:

- To gather, pray, inquire, listen, and evaluate the relevant aspects of this discussion for Fairhope UMC.
- To support the concerns of the congregation as we work to identify the critical questions that will need to be addressed in order to faithfully pursue God's will here at Fairhope UMC.
- To help serve as witnesses and educators to the congregation at large, seeking to provide prudent and accurate information in a timely fashion.
- To seek a deeper understanding of how the issues at hand are relevant to the theology, worship, outreach, and fellowship of our local congregation.
- To present to the Board of Stewards, after a period of due diligence and discovery, information and alternatives for the church's consideration of our next steps in the identity of mission and ministry for this congregation.

This work of discernment will be intended for the edification of the church (1 Thess. 5:11). The process will be established by the group themselves, with support from the pastors. It is expected to require a commitment of the next 6-12 months.

2. Has the Book of Discipline been changed from the 2016 edition regarding the issue of ordination of openly gay pastors or the celebration of a marriage ceremony between two gay persons?

ANSWER: No, the Book of Discipline was not changed in the last General Conference of The United Methodist Church held in 2016. The General Conference scheduled for 2020 was postponed due to the Covid pandemic. The next General Conference at which the Book of Discipline could possibly be changed will be held April 23 - May 4, 2024 in Charlotte, NC.

3. What is the deadline for United Methodist Churches to make a decision about possibly disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church?

ANSWER: In 2019, a special General Conference was held to discuss issues surrounding human sexuality. During that conference, paragraph 2553 of The Book of Discipline was updated to permit disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church over human sexuality. ([LINK TO PARAGRAPH 2553](#)) The deadline may vary from conference to conference. The Board of Trustees of the Alabama West Florida Conference has decided/ruled that the deadline for churches within the Conference to decide to disaffiliate has been extended to after General Conference (April 23-May 3, 2024). [AWFUMC: AWF Trustees Provide Update on Work Post Sunset Clause and Church Property](#)

4. Are any United Methodist Churches mandated to have a vote regarding disaffiliation?

ANSWER: NO

5. Who will decide whether or when Fairhope United Methodist Church will vote on the issue of disaffiliation?

ANSWER: The Board of Stewards of FUMC will make those decisions.

6. Is it true that the United Methodist Church is doing away with the core expressions of the orthodox faith, such as the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed?

ANSWER: No. That is not true

7. What are the relevant portions of The Book of Discipline regarding marriage between a man and woman?

ANSWER: §161 "C) Marriage— We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman."

8. If the General Conference changes its current stance on human sexuality as presented in the current Book of Discipline in 2024, does that mean that our pastors are expected to conduct same-sex wedding ceremonies at Fairhope UMC?

ANSWER: No. The option to preside over a wedding ceremony has always been at the discretion of the clergyperson under appointment. Furthermore, the determination of wedding policies for the local church property shall remain with the local church Board of Trustees (just as it is now).

9. If the General Conference changes its current stance on human sexuality as presented in the current Book of Discipline in 2024, does that mean that Fairhope UMC is suddenly compelled to receive the appointment of an openly gay or lesbian clergyperson?

ANSWER: No. Appointments are made by the bishop with consultation through the District Superintendents and the Staff Parish Relations Committee of the local church. The primary purpose of this process is to serve the mission and vision of disciple-making for that specific congregation. As Bishop Graves has stated repeatedly, "we are not looking to bring harm through an appointment, either for the church or the pastor." A consideration of our given context is important to remember. The fact of the matter is, even if a church in the Alabama West Florida Conference were to request an openly gay or lesbian clergyperson for appointment as their next pastor, there are none available!

10. The Discernment Team has read and recommends the reading of Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church, published by Abington Press. Purchase Book [here](#).