Franklin First UMC,

I wanted to share a few important decisions our Church Council has made over the spring.

As you likely have heard, some United Methodist Churches are electing to leave the denomination, primarily over debate related to matters of human sexuality.

First, you should know that, at present, and, at least until May of 2024, the United Methodist Church rules will not allow a United Methodist pastor to perform a same-gender wedding or an avowed, practicing homosexual person to be ordained.

The Book of Discipline states that “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” This has been the United Methodist position since 1972.

Since 1972 there has been increasing concern that these rules conflict with other statements, also in our Book of Discipline, that profess all persons are of sacred worth and created in God’s image. The Discipline says that United Methodist Churches are to “live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore,” (it uses that word), "We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian or gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”1

In recent years, some churches and pastors have chosen to disregard the prohibitions regarding weddings and ordination, while others have asked for greater penalties for those that do. For some, the disagreement has been frustrating and they have felt led to leave. For others, there has been a commitment to be part of a denomination that has room for differences of opinion on this matter while remaining united in their love for Jesus, their desire to follow Him and to help others become disciples of His.

 In 2019 a pathway that made it easier to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church was adopted. For the first time in Methodist history, churches could buy their property from the denomination. Not anticipating a global pandemic would postpone the 2020 General Conference, a provision was included that would close the window to leave by the end of 2023. Also included was discretion to allow Annual Conference’s Boards of Trustees to establish requirements for their particular Conferences.

Discernment Process Explanation:

The process, which must be initiated by the Church Council, requires a minimum of 30 days of prayer and discernment, during which the church property must be appraised and other financial obligations clarified. After the 30 days, a Church Meeting would be called to announce the anticipated financial cost of leaving the denomination and any other findings of how that decision would affect the local church. Then a vote would be cast, requiring two-thirds to vote in favor of closing as a United Methodist Church. All of this would have needed to be accomplished by March 1st of this year.

Our Council made the decision not to enter into this conversation on disaffiliation at this time, but to focus on the ministry and work that we’ve been called to undertake.

The Western North Carolina Annual Conference had a Called Annual Conference on May 6, 2023. At this conference, 192 churches were approved for disaffiliation from the Annual Conference and the United Methodist Church. If you would like to read more information about this conference: [Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church Releases Preliminary Results of Disaffiliation Vote, 192 Churches Approved for Disaffiliation (wnccumc.org)](about:blank)

The next General Conference will be April 23 - May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, NC. We do not know the outcome of how this conference will impact our Book of Discipline. But in this interim time, our church council has also voted to become a Lighthouse Congregation, a place which serves those who may have lost their church homes through disaffiliation or closure. This designation allows us to learn more before making historic decisions related to our future as a United Methodist Church. This will also allow us to remain focused on our mission - making disciples of Jesus Christ. We will continue to be a church that seeks to know, serve, and share Jesus Christ and that will receive the majority of our attention. If you would like to learn more, visit: [Lighthouse Congregations | The United Methodist Collective of North Carolina (nccumc.org)](about:blank)

If you would like to learn more about the Annual Conference’s Discernment Process, visit [Disaffiliation Process and Information (wnccumc.org)](about:blank).

If you want to watch a series of videos Pastor Adam Hamilton shared about his perspective on the United Methodist Church and how he perceives some of the concerns that have been alleged against our denomination, visit [proudtobeumc.com](about:blank).

We are certainly proud of our legacy as a United Methodist Church. You, First United Methodist Church Franklin, are faithful to love God and your neighbor. You continue to worship, grow, and serve. By God’s grace, we will work through this together, knowing, growing in, and sharing Jesus our Lord.

In Christ,

Church Council, First United Methodist Church Franklin

1 2016 Book of Discipline, paragraph 161.G, page 113.