

Minutes of the Discernment Committee - FUMC West Point, MS
6p.m. Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Present were Norma Atkins, Chuck Carson, Jeff Hairston, LaDonna Helveston, Tracey Holcombe, Art Shirley, Brooks Tinsley, Shannon Wallace, Dr. Darian Duckworth. Tommy Bryan joined via phone.

Dr. Darian opened the meeting with prayer and meditation.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the Lord is wise instruction, and humility comes before respect.

Brooks Tinsley clarified that Dr. Darian would not have a vote within the committee with Dr. Darian confirming she serves as spiritual leader only with no voting privileges.

The first order of business was to select a discernment committee chair person. Jeff Hairston nominated Chuck Carson. Norma Atkins seconded. A vote was held and Chuck was elected as Discernment Committee Chair.

Chuck Carson requested that there also be a Discernment Committee Vice Chair selected. LaDonna Helveston nominated Art Shirley which was seconded by Shannon Wallace. Norma Atkins nominated Brooks Tinsley which was seconded by Tracey Holcombe. A vote was held and Brooks Tinsley was elected Discernment Committee Vice Chair.

The next order of business was to select a recording secretary. Norma Atkins nominated LaDonna Helveston and LaDonna Helveston nominated Shannon Wallace. Both nominations were seconded by Tracey Holcombe. Shannon Wallace accepted the role of Discernment Committee Recording Secretary.

The deadline for notifying our conference that FUMC West Point is entering disaffiliation process was discussed and confirmed as August 15, 2023. The committee confirmed 30 day-post District Superintendent meeting requirement is waived for our specific church. Brooks Tinsley and Norma Atkins recommended a timeline for the committee be set. Art Shirley and Tracey Holcombe discussed the importance of a timeline for both the committee and the congregation. Art Shirley suggested we implement a timeline as a goal, but without required adherence to allow flexibility as we move through discernment process. Chairman Chuck Carson and Tracey Holcombe agreed with Art's suggestion. Shannon Wallace opposed immediate implementation of a timeline as first order of business and recommended we revisit the topic after everyone has an opportunity to review the information shared this week. Shannon Wallace also stated that if a timeline is implemented, August 1st would need to be our deadline to allow time for Administrative Council to be called. She also clarified this committee is responsible for making a recommendation to the Administrative Council and that only the Administrative Council can vote to officially enter into disaffiliation.

Group discussion was then held around the topics of order of sharing information, straw polls, surveys, implementation of timelines, and methods of sharing of information amongst the committee as well as the congregation. It was determined the committee would review examples from links to FUMC Columbus, MS, Madison FUMC, Park Avenue Church (GA) and Trinity (AL). Chuck Carson confirmed we have permission to utilize any materials from Columbus and we would need to obtain such permissions from other churches prior to public sharing. Dr. Darian confirmed permission from Trinity. Art Shirley

agreed to oversee implementing discernment committee updates and information within our local church website. Tracey Holcombe suggested we use a “ghost” page rather than placing on home page. The committee agreed this was a good idea. To provide our congregation with full transparency, the committee also considered audio and/or video recording meetings going forward. We will revisit this topic next meeting.

Jeff Hairston requested more information and confirmation of specific dates set by UMC and our conference.

Next steps are to gather specific information for review, including the David Stotts meeting follow up letter, bible study guide and detailed financial outline [pertaining to disaffiliation only] from our church office. Additional information sources for UMC deadlines and the MS Annual Conference Board of Trustees Extension Process will be shared with the committee prior to next meeting. The committee set a goal to evaluate options for straw votes, surveys and Q&A forms from above listed examples and finalize a first communication to the congregation. This will likely in Q&A format, but will be determined during next committee meeting to be held Thursday, June 15, 2023.

The meeting closed with Benediction.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up his countenance (Numbers 6:24-26)