

Minutes of the Discernment Committee - FUMC West Point, MS
6p.m. Thursday, June 29, 2023

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

Dr. Darian opened the meeting with mediation and prayer.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:1,2 and 7 (New Revised Standard Version)

June 22nd meeting minutes are noted as approved via email. Minutes have been posted to discernment page.

Old Business

Congregational Survey

Surveys were mailed to all resident members June 28, 2023. In some cases, addresses were not available or surveys were returned undeliverable. The committee decided copies of surveys will be available in the church office for anyone whom did not receive via mail. A maximum of 2 copies were mailed to each household. Any members with additional household members wishing to complete a survey may request a copy from the church office. Tommy Bryan will provide a drop box to be located outside the sanctuary. Surveys may also be returned by mail or dropped off at church office. Notice of survey will also be posted to discernment site both as announcement for anyone not on mailing list and as reminder to complete and return surveys. The committee also determined our compiled survey results will be shared with the congregation. The church office will manage receipt of all completed surveys and final results will be tabulated by the full discernment committee during in-person meeting(s) following the July 16th deadline for returning completed surveys.

Question & Answer Information for Discernment Page

The committee discussed specific congregational questions which we have not yet addressed through our informational releases. Where individual questions center around spiritual and/or biblical guidance, the committee asked Dr. Darian to offer additional guidance via the discernment page as well as personal communication with the individual as needed. We will also continue our general research on topics relating to both discernment and the disaffiliation process. Due to the extensive amount of material and details, we will continue to address topics in a logical order based upon the steps and timelines outlined by UMC and our MS conference. All congregational questions will be taken into consideration as we address each general topic. Committee members will continue individual research throughout the week, and members will discuss and refine the information relevant to this congregation during our next meeting. Upon final committee approval, Q&A updates will continue to be added on discernment site.

Guest Speaker

Dr. Steve West's presentation from Wednesday, June 28th was recorded and video will be posted to discernment site.

New Business

Guest Speaker

Vaughn Stafford will speak to West Point FUMC congregation July 9th at 4:30p.m. A current biography for Mr. Stafford will be posted to discernment site upon receipt from Vaughn. Following his presentation, a recording will also be posted to discernment site.

Q&A and Discernment Page Information

As the committee moves towards providing information around voting and transitional topics related to disaffiliation, we discussed the many areas in which we will be unable to provide factual information. Questions around “if” and “then what happens” are difficult to answer due to undetermined details that would make providing a factual answer impossible at this time. While researching materials related to how other churches have operated, we also discussed the specific task assigned this committee and where our role in the overall process ends. There was much discussion around our commitment to this congregation and determination to work as much as needed to fulfill our task juxtaposed against each of our own responsibilities to family and personal decisions. To provide further clarity to both our committee members and our congregation, Brooks Tinsley made a motion to enter on record “We acknowledge as a committee that after recommendation to Administrative Council, our commitment and obligation ends.” The motion was seconded by Art Shirley. Motion unanimously approved by those present.

The committee also discussed a recent question around materials we are using during this discernment process. The committee confirmed there is no single source guiding our actions, yet scripture as written in the Holy Bible is the foundation, primary source and guide. Additionally, we agreed our process of individual collection of source materials shared amongst the committee assists us as a group when we meet and discern appropriate information to share with our congregation. This method allows many sources, devotionals, sermons, perspectives and examples to be shared and discussed by nine committee members while under spiritual guidance from our pastor. Sources related to specific factual information and/or documents will continue to be provided with our information as applicable, but a full list of resources used by committee is too lengthy and varied to compile for the discernment site. This topic will continue to be considered as we move through the remainder of this process.

Other Business

During and following agenda topic discussions, committee members shared various thoughts, ideas and opinions. In some cases, there is full agreement amongst members, in other cases there are differences of opinion. As the meeting closed, members once again confirmed to one another that we all accept we can agree to disagree while continuing to complete our task. It was stated “salvation has nothing to do with denomination” and this committee is committed to first doing the work as guided by the Holy Spirit and second doing the work on behalf of this congregation. The necessity for information does not override the necessity for spiritual nourishment and guidance, and we as a committee have reconfirmed the need for our pastor’s guidance and voice amongst the congregation. The committee agrees Dr. Darian should, and would not be subject to our approval, when providing spiritual and scriptural information for the discernment site. There was a mixed atmosphere of weariness, heaviness of responsibility and yet joy that our committee is able to work well together, and our differences have not interfered with our ability to communicate and spend time in worship, fellowship and study together.

Next Steps

The discernment committee will continue to gather and share information with the congregation during upcoming weeks. Upon receipt of completed surveys, committee will begin process of compiling answers and determining best method of sharing those answers with our congregation.

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 upon you and give you peace.

(Numbers 6:24-26)

Next meeting will be held 6p.m. July 6, 2023