

# Manning United Methodist Church

The People of Manning United Methodist Church

Re: Closure and Separation Process Ending

October 29, 2024

Dear members and constituents of MUMC,

As was announced August 1<sup>st</sup> (via email and newsletter), in the “Closure and Separation 2025” document (emailed and published to the website on August 7<sup>th</sup>), the initial Town Hall meeting on August 8<sup>th</sup>, and reiterated at the following discussion groups, there was potential for a Judicial Council (our supreme court) decision that could affect the discernment process and opportunity for churches to exit The United Methodist Church. At their Annual Conferences the Kentucky Conference and the West-Alabama Conference made requests to the Judicial Council for a ruling on the use of paragraph 2549 of the *Book of Discipline* to allow churches to exit the denomination and receive the properties.

In its decision #1512, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church has ruled on the Alabama-West Florida Conference request and has stated that paragraph 2549 of the *Book of Discipline* **may not be used** to allow churches to exit The United Methodist Church.

Today, Pastor David received via email a statement from our Bishop, Leonard Fairley, and the Chair of Trustees for the Conference, Rev. Shannon Bullion, stating the following:

As a connectional church, the South Carolina Conference is bound by the decisions of the Judicial Council.

The impact of this decision is that, effective immediately, the Local Church Closure and Separation Process approved by the Trustees of the Annual Conference is no longer available as a means of separation from the denomination.

This means that, though you have completed the discernment process, a church conference vote will not be taken on whether or not MUMC should leave The United Methodist Church. This decision of the Judicial Council effectively eliminates the only current option for MUMC to leave The United Methodist Church.

Both the Judicial Council decision and the statement from Bishop Fairley and the Chair of Conference Trustees have been posted to our website under the “Discernment Process” menu tab.

You may recall that Pastor David has clarified for us on several occasions that paragraph 2549 was the only paragraph of the *Book of Discipline* that was being used in South Carolina to allow churches to leave. Our Resident Bishop at the time, Johnathan Holston, had ruled that churches that agreed with the 2019 *Book of Discipline* (which did not allow either same-sex marriages or self-avowed practicing



homosexuals to be ordained) could not use paragraph 2553 to disaffiliate from the church. Instead, the Bishop and Trustees provided a process using paragraph 2549. This process was announced on December 17, 2022. Some of you may ask why we did not enter the discernment process in 2022 or 2023, we call your attention to the reasons outlined in the August edition of the Manning Monthly Newsletter or the document entitled "Discernment Process Info 8/1/2024" under the "Discernment Process" tab on our website.

Pastor David called a Church Council meeting for Tuesday, October 29 at 6:30 PM for the purpose of announcing the Judicial Council decision and the effects of the decision to the Church Council. Your Church Council has decided to take the following steps in light of the decision of the Judicial Council and that of Bishop Fairley and Trustees of the SC Conference.

1. The church council approved a motion to cease all payments of apportionments to the SC Conference of The United Methodist Church.
2. A letter was drafted to Bishop Fairley announcing the church council's decision. That letter is attached.
3. This letter was authorized for immediate release to detail the church council's actions and to announce the end of the closure and separation process.

We know that many of you will be greatly upset by this development. There are some things that we wish to remind you of. The General Conference has not forced MUMC to allow same-sex weddings or for its pastor to officiate at them. The Board of Trustees and the Church Council of MUMC had made changes to our *A Policy on the Service of Christian Marriage* to include the following provision:

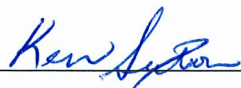
"Only couples comprised of one biological female and one biological male may be married on the grounds of Manning United Methodist Church."

It will continue to be the case that the appointment of pastors to MUMC will be made in consultation with the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and that their wishes will be factored into consideration regarding the appointing of LGBTQIA+ clergy.

We hope that you will consider the ministry that is happening here, your relationships with other parishioners, and the fact that God has not decided to abandon MUMC. We still experience the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit in our worship and service together. Let us not lose sight of that. We pray that you will continue to be part of the life of this congregation that has served this community for so many generations.

The Church Council intends that MUMC will continue to be welcoming to all people.

May the peace of Christ be with you all,  
The Church Council



Ken Sexton  
Chair of Church Council



Charlie Gavin  
Lay Leader

Cc: The Rev. Terry Fleming,  
District Superintendent, the Florence District of The UMC