



Discernment Process for Closure and Separation

Approved by the Church Council on July 14, 2024

Purpose:

The purpose of the discernment process is to provide an opportunity for the congregation to discern whether or not it can continue to do ministry as part of The United Methodist Church. This process is in preparation for a church conference vote on that question. As we navigate this process, we must pray for our conference leadership, local church leadership, pastor, and one another.

Discernment Committee:

The church council created a discernment committee to be comprised of Ken Sexton (Chair of Church Council), Charlie Gavin (Lay Leader), Billy Coffey (Member at Large of Council), Jake Buddin (Chair of Trustees), and Rev. David McManus. The committee is charged with ensuring that all of the requirements of the "Agreement to Separate" and the "Checklist for Closure and Separation" provided by the South Carolina Conference are met. The committee will also set the date for the final town hall meeting.

Meetings and Dates

Please read over the entire schedule. Either Ken Sexton (Church Council Chair) or Charlie Gavin (Lay Leader) will preside over the meetings. Rev. David McManus will be present to answer questions.

Initial Town Hall: Thursday, August 8th at 6:30 PM

This town hall style meeting will take place in the sanctuary and will have the following format:

1. 30 minutes for questions, answers, and discussion.
2. 30 minutes for speeches of 3:00 minute duration (5 for separation and 5 against)

Discussion group 1: Thursday, August 22nd at 6:30 PM

This discussion group will meet in the fellowship hall and is intended for those who wish to **remain** in The United Methodist Church. Others may also attend.

Discussion group 2: Thursday, September 12th at 6:30 PM

This discussion group will meet in the fellowship hall and is intended for those who wish to **separate** from The United Methodist Church. Others may also attend.

Discussion group 3: Thursday, September 26th at 6:30 PM

This discussion group will meet in the fellowship hall and is intended for those who are **undecided**. Others may also attend.

Final Town Hall: The date and time will be determined by the discernment committee after the Board of Trustees of the South Carolina Annual Conference has released the terms of separation for 2024-25.

This town hall style meeting will take place in the sanctuary and will have the following format:

1. Presentation of any known costs to separate.
2. Review of dates that requirements are due.
3. 30 minutes for speeches of 3:00 minute duration (5 for separation and 5 against)

Prayer Vigil: The Sunday prior to the church conference at 6:00 PM

Church Conference:

The District Superintendent will set the date and time of the church conference after all final information is available from the Board of Trustees of the South Carolina conference of The United Methodist Church. The church conference vote must take place by March 1, 2025. A two-thirds majority vote of the professing members present at the church conference is required to resolve that the congregation can no longer function as a United Methodist congregation.

Questions and answers:

Are we bound by the new requirements of the 2020/24 Book of Discipline or the Revised Social Principles? Will we be forced to receive an openly practicing gay pastor?

The Book of Discipline, as approved at each General Conference, is our church law and we must comply with its requirements. The Social Principles are not church law but serve as guidelines for responding to social issues.

The revisions allowing for same-gender marriages do not require that the local church allow those marriages to be performed on its grounds; neither do the revisions require that the pastor perform the marriages. Both the local church and the pastor are allowed to exercise their conscience.

It is now possible for openly practicing gay people to be ordained and appointed to local churches. There is no provision allowing a local church to refuse such an appointment, but appointments are made in consultation with the SPRC of the local church. The SPRC may convey the wishes of the congregation to the District Superintendent during a consultation, which is required by *The Book of Discipline*. The final decision regarding each appointment rests with the bishop.

How will information related to the discernment process be communicated? Will all critical information be sent as hard/paper copies?

Each time there is new information it will be provided via email, a Facebook post, the monthly newsletter, and the church website at: www.manningumc.com/discernment-process

If you wish to receive a hard copy of all announcements related to the discernment process, please contact the church office and request to be placed on the discernment process mailing list. Each of the town hall meetings and discussion groups will be listed in the bulletin at least 2 weeks prior. There will be an email reminder sent one week before each meeting. Please share this information with others.

Who may speak at the town hall meetings and discussion groups?

Everyone in attendance will be eligible to speak. It is imperative that you ask any question you may have during this process as others may benefit from the answer as well.

Who may vote at the church conference?

In order to vote at the church conference, you must be a professing member of the congregation. If you are not a professing member and you wish to join, please make the necessary arrangements with Rev. McManus.

What is a professing member?

A professing member is a baptized person who has made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, including repentance of sin, and accepting the freedom and power that God gives us to resist the works of sin in the world. In addition, a professing member has made a vow to serve Christ through The United Methodist Church and then a vow to participate in the life and ministry of the local church (Manning UMC) through their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. This is commonly referred to as "joining the church." You may have attended this church for 20 years and not be a professing member; and, therefore, ineligible to vote in the church conference.

How can I verify that I am a professing member of MUMC?

The pastor has recently finished compiling an electronic role from the information in our membership book, other printed membership lists, and the charge conference reports which include membership changes. The church staff and volunteers will be assisting the pastor in reviewing the resulting role for accuracy in the coming weeks. You may call the pastor to determine if you are on the role as a professing member.

Once completed, a list of professing members will be published for review. It will be available on our website under the "Discernment Process" menu tab and will be sent to our email list. Publication of the membership document will be announced in the bulletin, on Facebook, via email, and during worship. It will be your responsibility to review that list and ensure that your name is present on it. If

you discover that your name is not on the list of professing members, please contact Rev. McManus immediately.

Please do not assume that you are a professing member eligible to vote and then find out at the church conference that you are not on the list.

Must I be present to vote?

Yes. You must also be on time. There will be no acceptance of any vote at any other time for any reason; nor will there be absentee ballots of any kind. The doors to the sanctuary will be opened one hour before the announced time of the Church Conference. If you are not in line by the announced time of the Church Conference, you will not be allowed to vote.

How will we know who voted?

Registration will be required. Your name will be checked against a list of professing members. If your name is present, you will sign beside your name and only then will you receive a printed ballot. The printed ballots will be anonymous but the record of those who received ballots will be retained.

How will we vote?

The vote is required to be written. The ballot will allow for either a "Yes" or a "No" vote. A "Yes" vote will be a vote in favor of separating from The United Methodist Church. A "No" vote will be a vote against separating from The United Methodist Church.

How will my ballot be collected?

You will fold your ballot and pass it to the aisle end of your pew where it will be collected and carried to a table in the front of the sanctuary. The ballots will be separated by the District Superintendent according to "yes" or "no" and then counted by the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will certify the ballots and announce the result in front of everyone.

Will the costs of separation be provided to the congregation prior to the church conference vote?

The cost to meet each of the requirements of the "Agreement to Separate" provided by the South Carolina Conference will be made available at the final Town Hall meeting, via email, and the worship bulletin. According to the plan for 2023-24, those potential costs include:

- Ten percent of the appraised value of all church property
- Ten percent of the liquid assets
- Unpaid apportionments for prior year, if any
- Unpaid apportionments through date of closure, if any
- Additional 12 months of apportionments
- Balance due on direct bill to include amounts owed on debt forgiveness plan, if any.
- Church's share of unfunded pension obligation