

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

Dear church family,

There has been much anxiety in the air about our beloved United Methodist Church in the last few months. Some United Methodist Churches have entered a process to disaffiliate from the UMC, and a new denomination called the Global Methodist Church has launched. Many of us have friends or relatives in those churches, and I have been responding to church members every week with questions like, "What are we going to do? Is that going to happen to us?"

I have been closely monitoring all the developments, and I have been keeping our Administrative Board and other church leaders apprised of the situation. I have not held another town hall meeting like we did several times before the pandemic, because I did not feel like anything was about to affect our church. Any substantive decisions will have to wait for a General Conference of the United Methodist Church, which doesn't meet again until 2024.

The leadership of our church has been remarkably unified in its support of staying together and staying in the United Methodist Church. After my report to the Administrative Board on Sunday night, a motion was made and passed by unanimous voice vote: "It is the intention of the Administrative Board of this church to reaffirm our commitment to the United Methodist Church." It seems odd even to have a motion like that, but in the context of our denominational split, it is a significant statement. What does this affirmation by our leaders mean?

We plan to stay United Methodist. We do not plan to disaffiliate from the denomination. We will continue to abide by the Book of Discipline.

We will focus on the mission God has given us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Every week, we see or hear, "We are a community of faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit, growing together in God's grace, and sharing the love of Christ with the world." That's who we are and how we will stay.

Our core beliefs will stay the same: the authority of Scripture, the classic Christian doctrines contained in the historic creeds, and the Wesleyan theology of grace.

The "big tent" is still open! This statement by the Board is not intended to exclude anybody; in fact, it is intended to include everybody. However you consider yourself—conservative, liberal, traditionalist, centrist, or progressive—you are welcome at Fort Smith FUMC, and your opinions are respected and valued. We will continue to live by John Wesley's word: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may."

I love this church! I am proud of our church leaders. I hope this statement gives you a sense of security about our future. If you have a friend or relative that is looking for a solid, stable, welcoming community of faith, why don't you invite them here? As always, I am happy to have conversations about any questions or issues, and when the situation warrants, we will have further informational meetings. God bless you all!