

# *First United Methodist Church*

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To the Congregation:

In the past two years 225 United Methodist churches, representing about 23% of all United Methodist churches in the state, have separated from the denomination for reasons related to the implementation of policies regarding homosexuality, same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay clergy.

In late May the Church Council met with pastor Keith to be briefed on changes in church policy contained in The Book of Discipline as revised by the recently concluded General Conference. At that meeting were 35-40 church members, present as observers, which indicated a heightened interest in this subject among the congregation. Several council members also expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction with these changes. In an effort to gauge the level of concern among members of our congregation, pastor Keith encouraged individuals with concerns to share those with council members in the following weeks.

The Church Council met again on June 26 to review and assess that input from church members regarding the level of interest within the congregation for pursuing separation from the United Methodist Church. Council members reported being contacted via letter, email and personal conversations by possibly twenty different individuals. The views expressed ranged from support for the General Conference actions to grave concerns about these changes with the great majority noting unease and anxiety.

The first formal step in the separation process is a majority vote by the Church Council to initiate the 'Local Church Discernment Process' which involves collection of information, sharing of viewpoints, understanding the process and its consequences and culminates with a vote of the congregation to decide the issue. The Council felt that it needed more information before entertaining such a vote to begin this process. Consequently, a 'research and discovery' committee was formed to investigate and report back to the Council.

This committee met and determined three areas of review:

- 1. Separation Requirements** - a review of the specific steps, procedures, documents and resources required to complete the separation process
- 2. Financial Costs** - a full appraisal report of church assets as prepared by licensed professionals acceptable to the Annual Conference and from which a reasonable estimation of 'exit costs' can be calculated
- 3. Experiences of Others** - a full and frank discussion with officials from other Methodist churches which have completed the discernment process in order to benefit from their experience; determine areas of concern; identify unforeseen consequences or benefits; anticipate questions, problems and needs; and, if undertaken, make such a process as fruitful and meaningful as possible

This investigation is anticipated to require at least six weeks after which the results will be presented to the full Church Council and the congregation on September 12. Church members are encouraged to speak with Council members regarding this issue so that the council is well-informed in its decision-making process.

Your patience and understanding are sought as we work through this challenging period in the life of First United Methodist Church.

Prayerfully offered,



John Wagnon, Chair  
Church Council