

Hello Church Family,

I have been in ministry in the United Methodist Church for 37 years. There have been challenges in each season of ministry and appointment that I have served. As your pastor, I believe that the present challenge is to articulate the importance that there are very different theological trajectories for the people called Methodists. The recently elected President of the Council of Bishops of the UMC, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, stated last week that we need to elect new bishops in the UMC “to fulfill our mission and to position ourselves for the next expression of who God is calling us to be” (UMNews 5/20/2022).

Each United Methodist congregation is faced with deciding which “next expression” best aligns with who they are. We are faced with choosing either to remain in the United Methodist Church (UMC) and embrace the more progressive theological changes that are coming or to move to the newly created Global Methodist Church (GMC), where the traditional teachings and doctrinal stances are retained.

The trajectory of theological changes coming includes the authority and application of Scripture, the nature of who Jesus is, and the teaching of the church in matters of the theology of the body and human sexuality.

We believe that God’s love is for all people; that is not the issue. The issue is about the church making significant changes around the points above.

Growing up, my family spent a few weeks each summer at my mother’s family farm. My grandad was a dairy farmer and raised Belgium draft horses. They were majestic, large horses that historically had been used to pull farm equipment in the growing season and sleds over the frozen Wisconsin tundra in the winter. I remember him telling me that some horses could not be paired together because they couldn’t pull together. They would only be fighting against each other. Though this isn’t a perfect analogy, it is similar to the current state of the UMC.

The increasing acts of disobedience to the established covenant and the failure of leadership to follow the covenant is a major reason the denomination is pulling apart. Bishops are leading conferences in open defiance of the established Book of Discipline (the governing rules and theology for all United Methodists) with no accountability from other Bishops. It feels to me as if the Book of Discipline has become the Book of Suggestions.

As we discern what the future of our church should be, in the midst the uncertainty and disagreements, we can find guidance and comfort in scripture. In Acts 15, we read about the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. It was a division that led to the multiplication of the kingdom. Paul decides to take Silas to strengthen the churches in Syria and Cilicia; Barnabas takes John Mark, and they set out in a

different direction. The gospel is shared, churches are planted, and the kingdom of God spreads.

In order to choose either UMC or the GMC mentioned earlier, on June 5th, our Board of Stewards (BOS) will be deciding upon a *discernment process* that will lead up to our church membership voting on the future of our church denominational affiliation. The *discernment process* includes providing information on our website, dates for informational meetings, and prayer guidance/support during this process.

I will be available to any of you – as individuals or groups – to answer questions you might have. Most importantly, we will continue to thrive in our mission and ministry throughout this process and not allow it to distract us from our goal of sharing the gospel.

I ask two things of you. First, please join me, our leadership, and prayer teams in praying for wisdom, clarity, and grace as we seek to honor God and discern the future of our church. Second, that our conversations and discussions with each other be filled with grace. We can be confident that, during the uncertainty in our denomination, we can trust the certainty of God's faithfulness.

Thriving in Christ with you,
Dr. Burt Palmer, Sr. Pastor

