

AUMC INFORMATIONAL MEETING

MARCH 20, 2023

AGENDA

- Introduction
- Purpose
- How Do United Methodists Make Decisions?
- Brief UMC History
- What Does It Mean to Disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church?
- What Does It Mean to Stay with the United Methodist Church?
- Questions and Answers
- Closing

INTRODUCTION

- Opening Prayer
- Logistics
 - Expect tonight to last about 90 minutes
 - Tonight's session is an "Update" and opportunity to "Listen and Learn"
 - Opportunity to receive AUMC member input through "Survey"
- Presentations on "Disaffiliation from UMC " and "Staying with the UMC"
- Tonight is an Informational Meeting and it is not designed:
 - To answer all your questions – You are likely to have more after tonight
 - To tell you what to do
 - To vote

PURPOSE

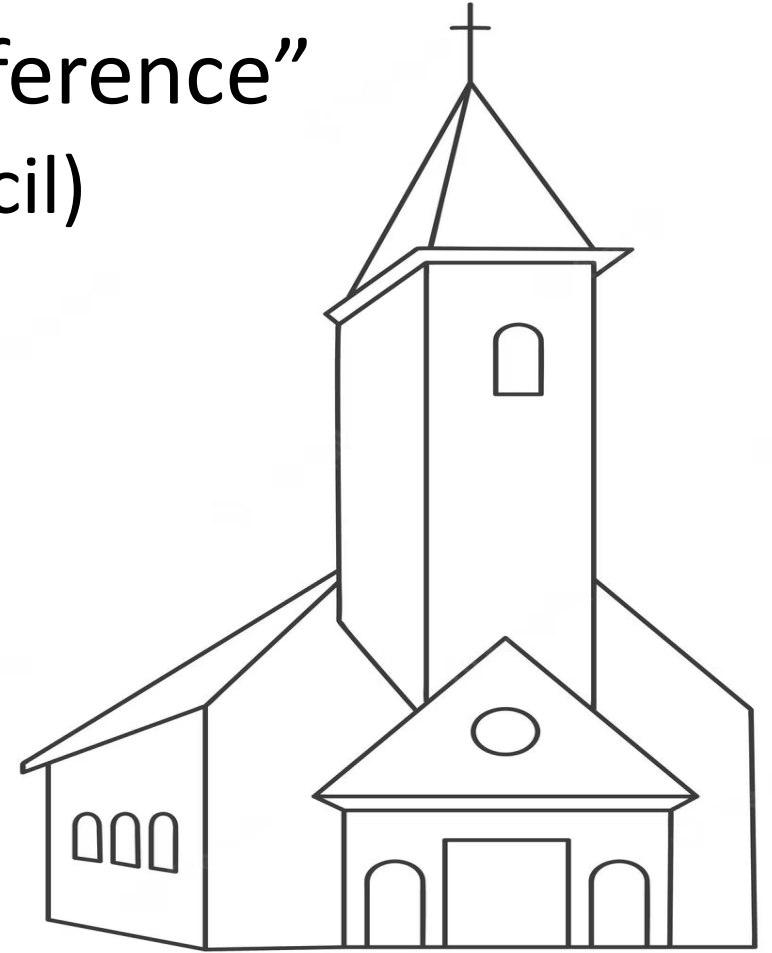
- WHAT? – Informational session, sharing accurate information about what is happening currently in the UMC
- WHY? – Clear up confusion and clarify misunderstandings AUMC congregation may have on the current state of the UMC
- WHO? – For the AUMC congregation by members of the "Listening and Learning" Task Force

HOW DO UNITED METHODISTS MAKE DECISIONS

Liz Kenemer

UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

- The Local Church – The “Charge Conference”
 - Administrative Board (or Church Council)
 - Book of Discipline (BoD):
 - “The agent of the Charge Conference”
 - Members at Large
 - Annual Conference Delegates
 - Chairs of SPR, Finance, and Trustees
 - Staff Parish Relations Committee
 - Finance Committee
 - Trustees



UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Local Church (AUMC)
- District –Regional Group of Local UM Churches
 - Montgomery – Opelika District
 - Rev. Dr. Jeff Wilson, Superintendent
 - Supports and Resources Local Churches
 - Leads and Supports Clergy
(Spiritually and Practically)



UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Local Church (AUMC)
- District (Montgomery-Opelika District)
- Conference –
Alabama West Florida Conference
 - Bishop David Graves, Presiding Elder
 - “Annual Conference” - meets each June
 - ½ Clergy and ½ Laity Delegates
 - Conducts the Business of the Conference
 - Ordains and Appoints Clergy
 - Supports Local Churches
 - Plants new churches



UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

- The Local Church (AUMC)
- District (Montgomery-Opelika District)
- Conference (Alabama West Florida Conference)
- Jurisdiction (and Central Conferences)
 - Southeastern Jurisdiction
 - “Jurisdictional Conference”
 - Meets every 4 years
 - ½ Clergy and ½ Laity Delegates
 - Conducts the Business of the Jurisdiction
 - Elects and Appoint Bishops
 - Appoints members of boards and agencies
 - Judicial Responsibilities



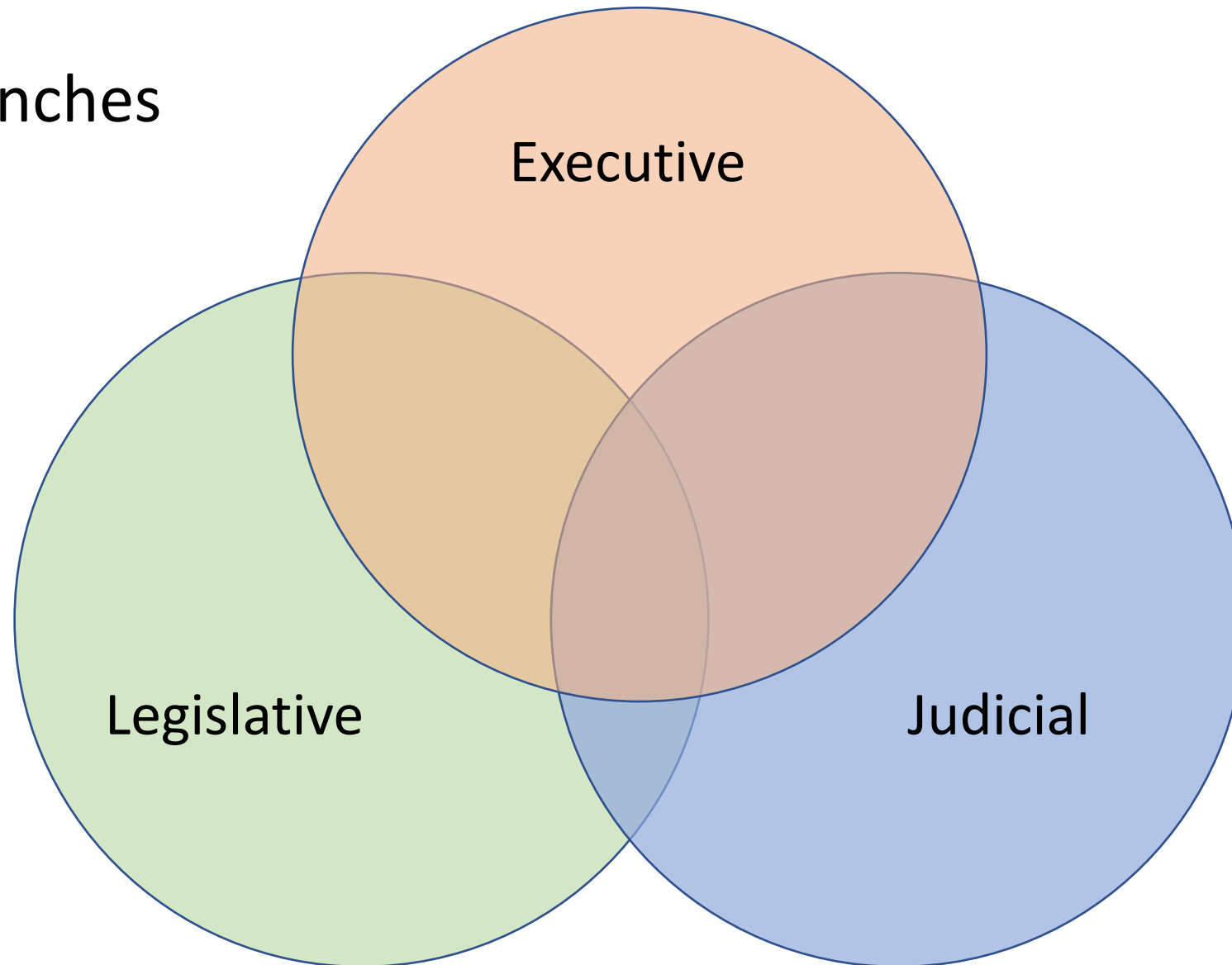
UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

- The Local Church (AUMC)
- District (Montgomery-Opelika District)
- Conference (Alabama West Florida Conference)
- Jurisdictions and Central Conferences (Southeastern Jurisdiction)
- **General Conference**
 - Meets Every 4 Years
 - ½ Clergy and ½ Laity Delegates
 - Sets the Polity and Mission for the Global UMC
 - Only body that “speaks” for the UMC
 - Only body that can change the BoD



UMC DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

Three Branches



UNDERSTANDING SOME OF THE ISSUES

Debbie Smalley

BRIEF UMC OVERVIEW

- In 1968, the United Methodist Church was formed as a result of the merger between the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) and the Methodist Church (USA)
- In 1972, beginning with the First General Conference of the new United Methodist Church – The following affirmations were made in the Book of Discipline, Part V., Social Principles

BOOK OF DISCIPLINE - MARRIAGE

BoD ¶161.C “We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”

BOOK OF DISCIPLINE – HUMAN SEXUALITY

BoD ¶161.G “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us.”

ADDED IN 1984

BoD ¶304.J.3 “While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve the the United Methodist Church.”

ADDED IN 2004

BoD ¶2702.1 “A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference, local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged with one or more of the following offenses:

(b) practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to being a self-avowed practicing homosexual, or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions, or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.”

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

- Following 2016 General Conference violations of church law (BoD) began occurring, for example:
 - In 2016, Rev Karen Oliveto, a self-avowed, practicing openly gay clergywoman married to a woman, was elected Bishop
 - In November 2022, a second self-avowed, practicing openly gay clergyman married to a man, was elected Bishop
 - In June, 2022, at the Florida Annual Conference, the Board of Ordained Ministry put forth two self-avowed, practicing homosexuals for provisional membership as clergy. The current bishop, Ken Carter, asked for a group vote instead of individual voting on this group of 16 candidates. All 16 were denied.
- Multiple Annual Conferences, 11 of 54, passed resolutions to ignore these provisions in the BoD
- Current violations of the BoD are not being addressed by the Bishops in any of the Jurisdictions (e.g., clergy officiating at same-sex marriages)
- Primary issue is lack of accountability and lack of enforcement of the disciplinary structure in accordance with the BoD

CONSEQUENCES OF POSTPONING THE 2022 GENERAL CONFERENCE

- Large group of General Conference delegates signed an open letter promoting the upcoming 2024 General Conference and the changes they anticipate taking place regarding the position of the United Methodist Church on homosexuality
- Outlined the possible implementation of the “One Church Plan” which removes language from the Book of Discipline that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual individuals
- Allows Churches to operate based upon their local context or culture
- The next General Conference will be held in 2024 as a postponed 2020 Conference with the elected 2020 delegates, less those delegates from churches that have disaffiliated from the UMC prior to the 2024 General Conference

LIMITED RIGHT OF DISAFFILIATION

BoD ¶2553 – EXPIRES 12/31/23

Because of the current, deep conflict within the UMC around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for ***reasons of conscience*** regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues.”

LIMITED RIGHT OF DISAFFILIATION

BoD ¶2553 – EXPIRES 12/31/23

- Current cost to disaffiliate - Unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionment fee; any unfunded pension plan payments; any grants received, if applicable
- After a Town Hall meeting and a Discernment period, a vote may be scheduled which requires a two-thirds majority vote of the professing members present on the day of the vote at a called church conference
- The Alabama-West Florida Conference must approve disaffiliation by a majority vote by the delegates on November 12, 2023
- The provisions of ¶2553 expire on 12/31/23 and shall not be used after that date

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DISAFFILIATE FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

Luke Chastain, Butch Foster, Pat Giddens, Joanna Reaves

DISCERNMENT & DISAFFILIATION – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Discernment – “perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding”
- In the United Methodist Church, it is a time where information is presented for a specific process that will lead to an inclusive, church-wide decision on a topic.
- Our current Discernment process is to determine our future with the United Methodist Church and the topic of Disaffiliation.

CURRENT ISSUES IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

- The Book of Discipline is the United Methodist rules and regulations that connect us and govern what we believe and how we run the church
- Many rules in the Book of Discipline have been broken without consequences
- The Book of Discipline is a living document that is subject to conference votes. These votes are increasingly leaning towards a liberalization of Church principles.
- As hundreds of Churches Disaffiliate, the strength of traditional voices is dwindling. This is true of our conference and the United Methodist Church as a whole.

CURRENT ISSUES AT AUBURN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

- The United Methodist Denomination has been shrinking since inception
- AUMC is rapidly losing members
- Whole ministries have disappeared
- Attendance is way down
- Giving to the Church is declining
- By any metric, the Church itself is in decline

THE TRUST CLAUSE

- We don't own our property. The United Methodist Church does and holds it "in trust" for us
- The value of our property and buildings is around \$30,000,000
- The Disaffiliation process gives us a way to control our property directly for about \$1,300,000
- Generations of members of this Church gave the money to assemble the property and build the buildings that we currently enjoy
- Owning our property would give us flexibility to control our destiny
- This pathway (BoD¶ 2553) expires 12/31/2023

OPTIONS FOR AUMC


- Remain with the United Methodist Church (do nothing)
 - Bishops select our ministers with limited input
 - Our money is shared with the denomination
 - Subject to the Book of Discipline and any changes
 - We do not own our property
- Disaffiliate and remain independent with our property
 - We would independently select pastors and govern ourselves
 - Our money would stay “home”
 - Our rules would be self-determined
- Disaffiliate and join another Methodist denomination with our property
 - We would work with the Denomination and select our pastor
 - Our money would be shared with the denomination
 - We would be subject to the new rules of the denomination

Staying United Methodist

Warren Nolan and Laura Bell

4 Pillars of the UMC

- Disciple-making
- Belonging and inclusion
- Influence, Connection, and Impact
- Experiencing God



Christian
Tradition

Reason

Personal
Experience

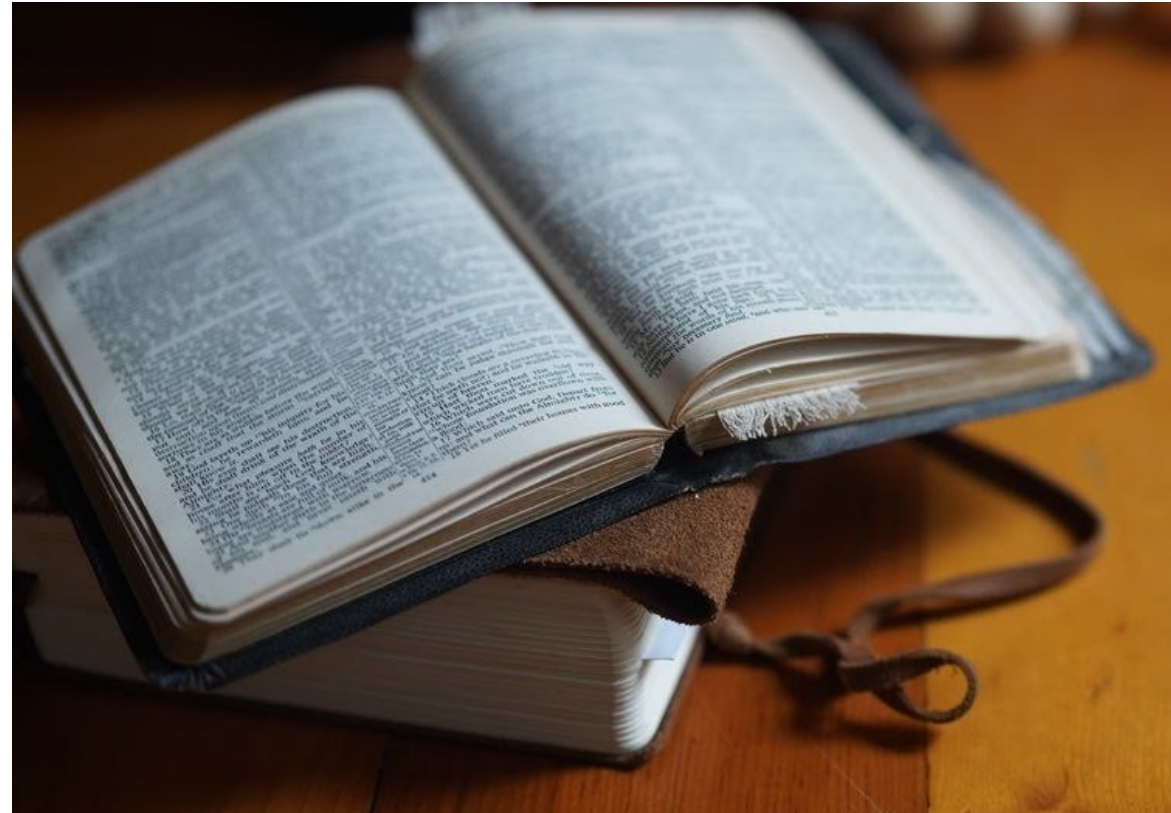
Scripture

John Wesley's Bases of Faith

Interpreting the Bible

“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 doubt, we may.
Herein all the children of God
may unite, notwithstanding
these smaller differences.”

—John Wesley



Interpreting the Bible

- Diverse experiences, traditions, and reason to study scripture increase our understanding of scripture.
 - How does Jesus examine the topic?
 - How does scripture reveal the heart and character of God?
 - What is the cultural context?

Apportionments



Trust Clause



- A beautiful part of our connectional system
- Property and assets are held in trust for the benefit of the entire denomination
- Established by John Wesley to prevent rogue pastors and members from coming on the scene and taking the church
- Wesley wanted Methodist churches to only and always teach the established Methodist doctrine

¶2553 in the Book of Discipline

- BoD ¶2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality—
- 1. *Basis*-- Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have ***a limited right***, under the provisions of this paragraph, ***to disaffiliate*** from the denomination for ***reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals*** as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, ***or the actions or inactions of its annual conference*** related to these issues which follow.

Myth Busters

MYTH: The United Methodist Church is moving to a more progressive stance regarding the interpretation of the Bible. Long held Biblical truths are being rewritten to modern day social standards.

Myth Busters: TRUTH

- No one is rewriting the Bible.
- Our doctrinal standards regarding the Bible:
 - Contains everything necessary and sufficient for salvation
 - Received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice.
 - Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith, nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation.
 - Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine, and we interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole. While we acknowledge the primacy of scripture in theological reflection, our attempts to grasp its meaning always involve tradition, experience, and reason. (*BoD ¶104 and ¶105*)

Myth Busters

MYTH: A growing number of ordained United Methodist ministers are questioning the Divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth and Jesus' resurrection.

Myth Busters: TRUTH

- There are no intentions, plans or legislation coming to General Conference to move the UMC away from the doctrines laid out in the Apostle's Creed or in our Doctrinal Standards as found in the *Book of Discipline*. In fact, there are very restrictive rules making it basically impossible to change the United Methodist doctrinal standards which include the historic doctrines of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren articles and confessions of faith (*BoD* ¶104). The doctrinal standards in the United Methodist Church do not include social issues or statements around marriage and family. Contained in our social principles. (*BoD* ¶161)

Myth Busters

MYTH: If AUMC remains UMC, some members will leave the church taking their tithes with them. A loss in membership, will cause AUMC to fall into dire financial straits. There will be a VERY real risk of default, and if this happens, the church will be taken over by the UMC Trust, probably sold, with the proceeds going to the Alabama West Florida Conference of the UMC and not back to local coffers.

Myth Busters: TRUTH

- Unfortunately, with the division created within the church, loss of membership is possible regardless of the decision made to remain UMC or disaffiliate.
- In either case, with a loss in membership and tithes, budgets will have to be adjusted to fit the scenario that remains until the church returns to the health and size to which we are accustomed.
- We may also add new members by staying UMC as other United Methodists are losing their local churches.
- There is no reason to believe AUMC would be closed or sold. AUMC is important to the Auburn community and to the Alabama West Florida Conference and will continue to be as we remain United Methodist.



“...destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends.”

-Martin Luther King

To remain UMC means

- We keep our pastors and staff
- We keep our connections to the conference and the extended community of United Methodism
- We support the broader UMC ministries and missions to serve and witness and care for all around the world and here locally
- We keep & build upon our history
- And we continue to make disciples for the transformation of the world



GRACE

“the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit.”



WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE LISTENING AND LEARNING TASK FORCE?

- Listen and Learn from the AUMC Congregation tonight through your survey input and in the coming days
- Summarize What We Have Heard
- Present Findings to the AUMC Administrative Board for their consideration within 7 days
- Closing Prayer