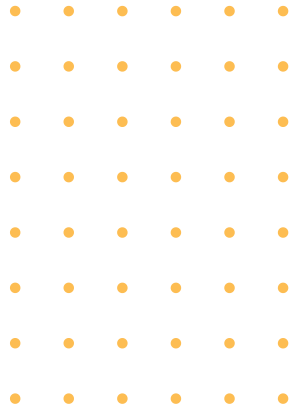
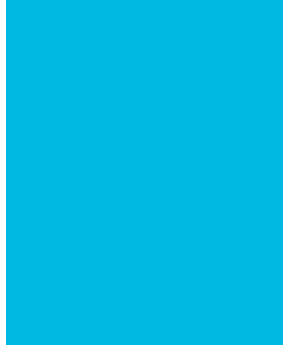




FIRST CHURCH

MYRTLE BEACH



THE WAY FORWARD

Denominational Affiliation 2024
DISCERNMENT GUIDE

THE WAY FORWARD



Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

ISAIAH 43:18-19 NIV

FROM YOUR LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

With regard to denominational discernment, we can't think of a more fitting Scripture to frame the moment we are experiencing right now: letting go of past divisions and theological misalignment within the greater United Methodist denomination while reaching for new opportunities to partner with God now and for decades to come. He is doing a new thing!



Please join us in prayer, as the church discerns its next step in ministry.

WHAT?

Due to the ongoing divisions within The United Methodist denomination, First Church joins over 7600 (25%) other United Methodist congregations across the nation in considering its future affiliation based on core values and theological beliefs.

Our Lay Advisory Committee, pastors, lay leadership, and Church Council have been studying the options to determine the best path forward.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: **DISAFFILIATION**

After a year of studying, researching, discussing and praying, First Church's Lay Advisory Committee and Church Council have both voted unanimously to recommend to the congregation that we disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church in order to preserve our church's traditional theological heritage and to advance the church's ministry into the future.

WHY?

For decades, leaders in The United Methodist Church have been distracted and divided by disagreement regarding: the divinity, authority, blood atonement, and bodily resurrection of Jesus; Biblical authority and interpretation; sexual ethics and the definition of marriage. Where practices deviated from church doctrine as outlined in Holy Scripture and The Book of Discipline, the United Methodist Church has suffered from a lack of accountability.

THEOLOGICAL MISALIGNMENT

Today progressive theology is becoming the prevailing standard within the United Methodist denomination, especially now that over 25% of the most conservative and traditional voices have left the denomination. Separating has many advantages, which are described in the next few pages. More importantly, it allows us to fulfill our mission without interruption or redirection by progressive agendas currently being set by some United Methodist bishops, ministers, professors, and others.

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

First Church is committed to upholding the traditional, apostolic witness of Holy Scripture as authoritative in all matters of faith and living. The historic Christian faith, as documented in the Bible, offers a transforming relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be replaced, reinvented or rewritten by individuals who seek to make a different version of personal truth, faith, or morality.

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“In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church. And Scripture is the best expounder of Scripture. The best way, therefore, to understand it, is carefully to compare Scripture with Scripture, and thereby learn the true meaning of it.”

-John Wesley

PRESERVATION OF MISSION

Founded on the traditional, evangelical and theological principles of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, First Church has had a rich history of mission, growth, generosity, and ministry.

Through disaffiliation, First Church seeks to strengthen and advance its current role within traditional Methodism by:

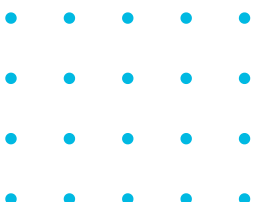
- Fulfilling our mission to **Follow Jesus and Share Him With Others**
- Advancing our heritage as a Bible believing, mission minded, caring congregation of faith
- Our commitment will be to continue worshipping, operating, teaching and reaching out in the ways that we always have.

FULL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Separation will release First Church from The UMC's property trust clause — a historic claim made by The UMC and written into the church's articles of incorporation. In the UMC, local churches do not own their property, building, or assets. They hold them in trust to the denomination. In order to leave the denomination and retain our property, buildings, and assets we will have to meet the terms of the Agreement to Separate put out by the Bishop and Trustees of the SC Annual Conference.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

At First Church, discernment and affiliation decisions are focused on the primary matters of scriptural authority. In regards to Christian marriage and human sexuality, we believe in celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage, with marriage being defined between a man and a woman. First Church relies on the Scriptures and what orthodox Christians have believed to guide all matters of human relations, including sexual ethics.



WHY NOW?

First Church has a limited window to take action before United Methodist leadership and policy could change.

NEW BISHOP

Presiding Bishop of the SC Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, Rev. Jonathan Holston, is assigned until September of 2024. A new bishop could be much more progressive in theology and practice, as many bishops have recently demonstrated.

NEW PASTORAL LEADERSHIP AND REVISED MISSION

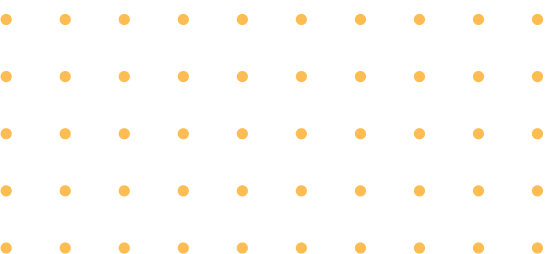
A new senior pastor could be appointed to First Church with a revised mission and ministry focus. Existing worship and programs may be redesigned in a more progressive direction. Church culture may shift dramatically.

LIMITED TIMING

Bishop Holston and the Board of Trustees of the S.C. Annual Conference have given a March 1, 2024 deadline to complete this process. If not completed by March 1, the process will be delayed until 2025. There is a concern that when the General Conference meets in 2024, this separation process may no longer be available or may become more difficult and expensive.

HIGHER COSTS

Following the departure of more traditional congregations, the UMC is smaller. There are 25% fewer churches left to fund the operations of the continuing United Methodist Church. To date, 7600+ (25%) churches have already disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church, including many of the largest churches. This will result in higher apportionments for remaining congregations. After only 12% of SC churches disaffiliated in June of 2023, our apportionments increased by \$20,000 to the amount of \$198,680, annually, even with a 15% decrease in the Annual Conference budget.





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT WILL CHANGE IF OUR CHURCH LEAVES THE UMC?

Our church will continue to advance its mission to **Follow Jesus, and Share Him With Others**. Our pastors, church council, lay leadership, and committed members are working to ensure the ministry and mission of our church continue and move forward without interruption or redirection. If we disaffiliate, our intent is to continue operating as we have been.

WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF DISAFFILIATION FOR OUR CHURCH?

The financial obligations associated with separation in the SC Annual Conference are as follows: 1) 10% of the appraised property value of all church property, 2) 10 % liquid assets, 3) any unpaid apportionments along with 12 months of additional apportionments, and 4) a proportional amount of unfunded pension liability.

Our cost of disaffiliation is estimated at: \$1,087,538. An anonymous donor has agreed to fund the disaffiliation costs up to \$1,000,000 if we meet all of the terms to disaffiliate. We have cash reserves to cover the balance of the cost.

ARE LGBTQIA+ PERSONS WELCOME AT OUR CHURCH?

Absolutely. First Church views all people as individuals of sacred worth. We will welcome all people and minister to all people. We extend grace and respect to all who call First Church their home.

For more information such as the South Carolina terms for disaffiliation, visit our website at: <https://www.fumcmb.org/way-forward.html>



WHEN?

SEPARATION VOTE IN JANUARY

Full Professing Members of First Church are called to participate in a vote to separate from The United Methodist Church on January 21st at 3:30pm in the Sanctuary. Members must be present in the Sanctuary at the time of vote. Please arrive early in order to be properly signed in. We will have a special time of music and prayer in the Sanctuary before the vote.

PRAYER

Please be in prayer daily as you discern how to vote. The Sanctuary and the Chapel will also be available for prayer during regular church office hours, Monday-Friday.

FUTURE DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

First Church seeks to advance its connectional and missional Methodist emphasis and heritage; however, it is too soon to determine a specific affiliation pathway for our future. If we vote to disaffiliate we will become an independent Methodist Church with the *option* of joining another Methodist denomination at some time in the future.

