

## Discernment Update 12/28/22

Helena Church Family,

Please make plans to join us for one or both of our dialogue sessions on Wednesday evening, January 4, at 6:30 pm and Sunday afternoon, January 8, at 3:00 pm. This time has been set aside to allow the team to hear input from members of the congregation. These conversations are a vital part of the team's work in preparation for a recommendation to our Church Council. Each member of the team has had, and will continue to have, conversations with individuals in small groups and other encounters, but these larger sessions will give the entire team a chance to hear from a variety of members as well as let members hear from one another. Please also bring your questions so that we can continue to gather and share information about the issues most important to you. Your voice strongly impacts the future direction of our church so we hope you will make time to join us and participate in these important conversations.

The North Alabama Conference required us to submit a model for our discernment process. We submitted a model based on Ignatian Discernment and it was approved by our DS at the beginning of our process. This model is one of several options recommended by our bishop and has been used by other churches. The link is at the bottom of this email. I encourage you to read through this document and let it guide you as you continue your personal time of prayer and discernment. While we are experiencing this time together as a congregation, this is truly a personal process for each of us, and not a corporate one.

The discernment model was accompanied by our tentative timeline, which was sent out in a previous email. Dates on this timeline will be updated as we begin nearing the end of our required 3-month period and solidify our meeting schedules. The earliest date for our team to make its recommendation to the Church Council would be February 6.

Members of the team are also hearing questions about what would happen next if we do choose to disaffiliate from the UMC. There are several options to consider. The team will continue to research options and we invite you

do to the same. There is information available online regarding a variety of branches of Methodism. All of the options being considered are still Methodist churches, rooted in Wesleyan theology and practice. I will attach a chart to this email that outlines some key considerations. This chart was prepared by a writer at Good News Magazine, not our team. All of the options have websites where you can go for more information. I can also share speaker videos in a future email. Again, this decision is only necessary if there is a vote to disaffiliate. Spend time on this when/if you feel it applies to you.

There is much to consider during this time. The approach of a new year seems a fitting time for each of us to engage in this process. I'm sure some of you may feel as if your personal discernment has been completed, but as you will see in the Ignatian process, one step is to rest in your decision to gain confidence that you are at peace with it. For others, you may feel overwhelmed by the task. As you begin to more fully engage in the process, I pray you will also find peace.

***Pam Hand***