



Statement of Belin Memorial UMC's Church Council

Adopted March 6, 2023

In January 2023 Belin Memorial UMC's Church Council agreed not to enter into the South Carolina Annual Conference's "Local Church Discernment Process" for 2023. This decision was made based on the fact that the United Methodist Church's General Conference will be held in 2024, and until then nothing has or will change in The Book of Discipline. There will be a variety of proposals put before the General Conference and which will be adopted and how they will impact the local church remains to be seen. Decisions made before that are decisions based on speculation. Ultimately, the "Discernment Process" is a monumental task for a church of our size that would completely shift the focus of our clergy, staff and congregation from our Mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ. Council felt it would be unwise to pursue such a monumental undertaking based on speculation.

The Church Council will monitor the situation and productive conversations will continue. Any questions/comments are welcome and can be sent to: Council@Belinumc.org.

The Council thanks you for continuing to make disciples of Jesus Christ!



Discernment Process Explanation January 20, 2023

Hi, Belin Church Family. I wanted to share with you an important decision our Church Council made last week.

As you may have heard, some United Methodist Churches are electing to leave the denomination, primarily over debate related to matters of human sexuality.

Our Council voted not to engage in a discernment process this year that could lead to leaving the denomination. This video is meant to give background about how the vote came to be, why the Council made the decision they made, and how you can learn more.

First, you should know that, at present, and, at least until May of 2024, the United Methodist Church rules will not allow a United Methodist pastor to perform a same-gender wedding or an avowed, practicing homosexual person to be ordained.

The Book of Discipline states that “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” This has been the United Methodist position since 1972.

And, since 1972 there has been increasing concern that these rules are in conflict with other statements, also in our Book of Discipline, that profess all persons are of sacred worth and created in God’s image. The Discipline says that United Methodist Churches are to “live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore,” it uses that word, “We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian or gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”¹

In recent years, some churches and pastors have chosen to disregard the prohibitions regarding weddings and ordination, while others have asked for greater penalties for those that do. For some, the disagreement has been frustrating and they have felt led to leave. For others, there has been a commitment to be part of a denomination that has room for differences of opinion on this matter while remaining united in their love for Jesus, their desire to follow him and to help others become disciples of his.

In 2019 a pathway that made it easier to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church was adopted. For the first time in Methodist history, churches could buy their property from the denomination. Not anticipating a global pandemic would postpone the 2020 General Conference, a provision was included that would close the window to leave by the end of 2023. Also included was a fair amount of discretion to allow Annual Conference's Boards of Trustees to establish requirements for their particular Conferences. The South Carolina Annual Conference has recently released a "Discernment Process" that churches wishing to leave the denomination must enter. Technically speaking, they would close their church and transfer assets to a new church entity.

1 2016 Book of Discipline, paragraph 161.G, page 113.

The process, which must be initiated by the Church Council, requires a minimum of 30 days of prayer and discernment, during which the church property must be appraised and other financial obligations clarified. After the 30 days, a Church Meeting would be called to announce the anticipated financial cost of leaving the denomination and any other findings of how that decision would affect the local church. Then a vote would be cast, requiring two-thirds to vote in favor of closing as a United Methodist Church. All of this would need to be accomplished by March 1st of this year.

Learning all that is required to enter the process and that this process is available to the local churches any year - the 2023 sunset provision does not apply, our Church Council elected to not enter it. It was determined that it is premature to go through the process given both the time constraints and lack of knowledge. There has been a lot of speculation about what will happen at the General Conference in 2024, but we simply do not know the outcome and how that will impact local churches. We also recognized that to accomplish all of this before March of 2023 would mean essentially putting the rest of our ministry on pause between now and then.

You should know that the Council's recent vote does not preclude taking another at a different time. It does give us time to have conversations about how Bible-believing, God and neighbor-loving followers of Jesus can reach different conclusions on what is faithful in these matters.

Our Council's decision to learn more before making historic decisions related to our future as a United Methodist Church will also allow us to remain focused on our mission - making disciples of Jesus Christ. We will continue to be a church that seeks to know, serve, and share Jesus Christ and that will receive the majority of our attention, even as we sort through the denominational issues.

If you would like to learn more about the South Carolina Annual Conference's Discernment Process, visit umcsc.org/discern.

If you would like to stay abreast of what is happening denominationally, including about matters related to what I have discussed today, I suggest umnews.org.

If you want to watch a series of videos Pastor Adam Hamilton shared about his perspective on the United Methodist Church and how he perceives some of the concerns that have been alleged against our denomination, visit proudtobeumc.com.

I am certainly proud to be a pastor of our church. You, Belin Memorial United Methodist Church, are faithful to love God and love neighbor. You continue to worship, grow, and serve. By God's grace, we will work through this together, knowing, growing in, and sharing Jesus our Lord.

May God bless us in that.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Malambri', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Will Malambri
Senior Pastor