

Belin Memorial UMC
Questions to Church Council

The following questions are printed as submitted to the Church Council during a meeting on October 2, 2023. The responses were the consensus of the Church Council discussed and adopted during meetings held on October 16 and 30, 2023.

1. **Is our “head in the sand” with regards to what is going on (especially when considering 20% of churches have disaffiliated from the UMC; what do these churches know that we don’t)?**

Continue to generate conversations & communication

The Council intends to continue learning and sharing what we can about the UMC. We recognize that over 6000 churches electing to leave the UMC is of concern. We also recognize that over 24,000 have remained within the denomination. We do not believe that anything has happened thus far to necessitate Belin ending a 99-year history with our denomination.

2. **What are the changes in the UMC that have already occurred? (e.g. gay bishops, marriages, not following the *Book of Discipline*)**

Other conferences not following the *Book of Discipline*; none in SC

While there has been no official change within the UMC since 2019 (all official policy changes occur during General Conferences and the last was held in 2019), there have been Annual Conferences and clergy who have disobeyed the *Book of Discipline’s* prohibition on ordaining or marrying homosexual persons. There are no known occurrences of these violations within the South Carolina Annual Conference of the UMC.

3. **Why has there been no discipline for UMC pastors and bishops who disobey the current governing rules in the *Book of Discipline*?**

There has been discipline. There are ongoing trials. Some are in abeyance.

Different bishops and Annual Conferences have chosen to handle violations of the *Book of Discipline* differently. Some trials have occurred, while others have been held in abeyance awaiting resolution about the denomination’s stance on matters related to human sexuality. For some bishops and pastors this is regarded as a civil rights issue and disobedience has been an attempt to facilitate change to what they believe to be an injustice.

4. **Since many of us have homosexual friends, work colleagues, and family members and since homosexual people have been welcomed at Belin, why is there so much concern over this issue at Belin?**

Growing concern of the progressive direction of UMC

The increased concern seems to be that increased acceptance of homosexual persons would lead to other so-called progressive policies. While the UMC has always had members and stances across the theological spectrum, there is theological doctrine that

is unchangeable and that remains the moorings under which theological debate occurs (see response to question 10).

5. Why hasn't the congregation been polled?

Not enough information.

Polling questions need to be well-crafted to glean the best information possible and to not create confusion or alarm. The Council continues to seek information and work to find best ways to disseminate information prior to polling the congregation.

6. When can an education program for the entire congregation start?

Currently & ongoing

Throughout the year the pastors and Council have shared with the congregation, classes/groups, and individuals. It is the Council's commitment to continue to relay additional information as it is discovered. We expect this to happen more broadly in 2024 as we draw nearer to and come out of the April 23-May 3, 2024 General Conference meeting.

7. Why has there not been discussion held between the ministers and the congregation?

They have met with those that requested it and will continue to do so.

The pastors have met with individuals, groups, and published *Inlet View* articles throughout the year.

8. Should we go to Church Council to ask to start the discernment process?

No

The South Carolina Annual Conference's policy states that the Church Council initiates the Discernment Process (<https://www.umcsc.org/discern/>). The Council determined in January of 2023 to not enter the process. We made this determination based on the amount of work required and the amount of time to accomplish between January and March of 2023. The Council has also concluded that it would be premature to enter a process that can be both distractive and divisive prior to General Conference, 2024.

9. Does Belin's leadership believe the Bible is the authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16) or do they hold to the "3 buckets" of Adam Hamilton (1: reveals God's will, 2: revealed God's will at previous time but no longer does, 3: never reflected God's will and heart)?

Yes and Yes

Belin's leadership holds the Bible to be authoritative. It is the basis of sermons and teachings and helps reveal God and God's will to us.

United Methodist doctrine states that "Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine" (*The Book of Discipline*, paragraph 105), speaking to its authority. *The Book of Discipline* also states that we "draw upon the careful historical, literary, and textual studies of recent years...our attempts to grasp (scripture's) meaning always involve tradition, experience, and reason." (paragraph 105), speaking to the necessity of

interpretation. Since scripture was written 1900+ years ago in other languages (Hebrew and Greek) interpretation is required for all who take the Bible seriously.

10. Does Belin’s leadership believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12), or as some UMC leaders believe, Jesus is a way among many ways.

Yes

Belin’s leadership believes Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and our source for salvation. We do not believe Jesus is a way among many ways. The privileges for divine judgment and the ability to grant eternal salvation are reserved for Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

This is our conviction and the conviction of the United Methodist Church. The “Restrictive Rules” (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/glossary-restrictive-rules-the>) do not allow the UMC to “revoke, alter, or change” particular teachings of the UMC, including the following:

- Article II (of the *Articles of Religion*)— Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man
 - The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.
- Article III (of the *Articles of Religion*)— Of the Resurrection of Christ
 - Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.
- Article II (of the *Confession of Faith*)— Jesus Christ
 - We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. As ministering Servant he lived, suffered and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all men will be judged.

11. Is the position of Belin’s leadership concerning sexuality consistent with that currently stated in the *Book of Discipline* (to not ordain homosexual pastors and to not perform gay marriages), or do they believe the rules stated in the *Book of Discipline* should be changed?

Our pastors are committed to the *Book of Discipline*

Our pastors and leadership seek to conduct themselves in accordance with the *Book of Discipline* and intend to continue to do so accordingly. In order to allow the UMC to have flexibility for ministry in different contexts and to reflect the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry, the pastors are interested in learning more about the regionalization plan that is being proposed (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-regionalization-part-1>).

12. How does the UMC justify the proposed changes to the *Book of Discipline* and reconcile it with the word of God?

Unknown

Some leaders have suggested that the likeliest change in 2024 would be to include the U.S. churches in the regionalization plan. If passed, it would then be possible in 2024 or 2026 for the U.S. churches to have the prohibitions against performing same-sex weddings and ordination of homosexual persons removed. It remains to be seen how much local autonomy will be included in the legislation, but, as has always been the case, UMC clergy would retain the right to decline performing any wedding.

The United Methodist Church is made up of over 10 million members worldwide. Within that is a wide variety of theological perspectives. Faithful Christians have studied the scriptures and come to different conclusions about the meaning and intent of the few passages that directly address homosexuality. That, combined with reading those passages in context of the overarching message of the gospel, has led some laity, scholars, and pastors to conclude that it is not God's will to prohibit homosexual persons from entering into a marriage covenant or from serving God as a clergy person.

13. How come over 6,000 churches have already been through this process and left the UMC and we had to establish a grass-roots campaign to acknowledge that it's an issue in our church.

Unknown

The Church Council has discussed the issue at meetings and the pastors have had many conversations and multiple presentations related to it. In January and March of 2023 Council statements were published to the congregation. The March communication included announcing an email account that had been created so that questions and comments could be sent directly to Council leadership. Prior to September 2023, this generated one question, which received a prompt response. When additional concerns were raised in September it resulted in three Council meetings in October of 2023 allowing considerable time for discussing the issues raised.