



July 25, 2022

Dear First Methodist Conroe,

In his book, *A Tale of Two Cities*, author Charles Dickens begins with the now famous phrase, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” Though his words originally applied to the two cities of London and Paris during the French Revolution, the same could be said about the state of First Methodist Conroe and its mother denomination, The United Methodist Church.

Indeed, at First Methodist Conroe, it is “the best of times.” Our youth and children’s ministries are growing, new Life Groups are forming, our Traditional, Table and Celebración worship communities are thriving, and each week first time guests are warmly welcomed and are deciding that FMC will be their new church home. We also stand ready to extend our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ and inviting all to experience Life. Better. Together. to the rapidly growing community of The Woodlands Hills and surrounding areas of north Conroe and Willis. For our local ministries at FMC, the future has never looked brighter!

At the same time, denominationally, it is “the worst of times.” Decades of debate about the interpretation of scripture surrounding issues of human sexuality have created an environment of distrust and disobedience that has proved detrimental to its mission. While the vast majority of United Methodist clergy have continued to faithfully follow the vows taken at ordination, there has been an increasing willingness of some pastors, bishops, and Boards of Ordained Ministry to break the bounds of the Book of Discipline.

Specifically, since 1972, the United Methodist Book of Discipline has consistently maintained the biblical teaching that all persons are children of God, created with sacred worth, and are welcome in the church. It has also maintained that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, that homosexual persons may not be married in UMC churches, that our ministers may not officiate such weddings, and that self-avowed practicing homosexuals may not be ordained as clergy.

In 2019, the Special Session of General Conference, called specifically to address such matters, once again affirmed the traditional teachings on human sexuality. Continued divisions culminated in a called vote on a proposed path forward that would allow for conservative and progressive United Methodists to go their separate ways. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and its related attendance logistics for African, European, and Asian delegates prompted the postponement of the 2020 General Conference to 2024.

In the wake of this postponement, three recent events have impacted churches in the Texas Annual Conference (TAC). First, the Global Methodist Church officially launched on May 1, 2022, providing a new denomination for traditional Methodists to align with. Second, under the provisions of Book of Discipline paragraph 2553, the Texas Annual Conference has adopted a process and pathway that allows congregations to disaffiliate from the UMC in a spirit of grace and respect. This provision expires December 31, 2023. Third, our Bishop Scott Jones announced his retirement effective December 31, 2022. His retirement, the uncertainty of who will be the next appointed Bishop, and the possibility that in the future the Texas Annual Conference could reflect the progressive values seen presently in

other parts of the denomination, has led many congregations, including ours, to begin a discernment process. This process will help churches determine if they will remain in the United Methodist Church or choose an alternative option such as the Global Methodist Church.

For First Methodist Conroe, the question we must discern is this:

“Which denominational affiliation will best support the mission and vision of FMC both now and in the future?”

On June 2nd, the FMC Leadership Team voted to approve the formation of a Discernment Task Force to develop a recommendation on how to move forward. On July 11th, the Leadership Team approved the recommendation by the Discernment Task Force for a church-wide discernment period culminating in a Church Conference vote on October 9, 2022, to answer the above question.

Remembering that this is a process, we are committed to praying for our congregation, attending all Conference and District informational meetings, and gathering available information regarding FMC’s options for future affiliation along with the benefits and drawbacks of each as it pertains to theological, organizational, financial, and other implications.

Over the next three months, we ask that you join us and commit to the following:

- **PRAYER:** Pray daily for our congregation, our pastors, and our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- **INFORMATION:** Stay informed by going to our church website, www.fmconroe.org/fmcdiscernment. There we will have the discernment timeline, pertinent information, and answers to “Frequently Asked Questions.”
- **ATTENDANCE:** Commit to attend these upcoming events
 - o **August 13 – 10:00-11:30 AM – John Wesley UMC – 5830 Bermuda Dunes Drive Houston, TX 77069** – Central North District meeting with the TAC Future Discernment Task Force (FDTF) Will include presentations from Bishop Scott Jones, District Superintendent Jeff Olive, Conference Treasurer Carol Bruse and Texas Annual Conference representatives from the FDTF and Q&A Session.
 - o **August 14 – 4 PM – FMC Sanctuary – Town Hall #1 – in English**
6PM – Chapel – in Spanish – Presentations from FMC Leadership and Discernment Teams explaining process, options and Q&A. Questions may be pre-submitted at www.fmconroe.org/fmcdiscernment.
 - o **September 18 – 4 PM – FMC Sanctuary – Town Hall #2 – in English**
6PM – Chapel – in Spanish – Presentations from official representatives from The Global Methodist Church and The United Methodist Church and Q&A. More information to follow. Questions may be pre-submitted at www.fmconroe.org/fmcdiscernment.
 - o **October 9 – 4 PM – FMC Sanctuary – Church Conference** vote to decide FMC’s future denominational affiliation presided by District Superintendent Dr. Jeff Olive. All professing members of First Methodist Conroe are eligible to vote in person at the meeting by written ballot. To verify membership, contact Tommi Hamilton – thamilton@fmconroe.org by September 30.

Though we find ourselves in a difficult season of discernment, we truly believe that the best days of FMC are in front of us.

Serving Christ with you,

FMC Leadership Team

Debbie Templet – *Chair*
Ana Alfaro
John Ankoviak
Jesus Becerra
Keith Cartwright
Mona Draper
Steve Eckenrode
Stacy Ferro
Jan Floro
Doug Frankhouser
Forrest Lane
Lauren Longmire
Matthew McDonald
Israel Perales
Ray Arnold –
Lay Leader
Andy Fritsch –
Ministry Team Chair

FMC Clergy

Dr. Daniel Irving
Senior Pastor
Rev. Ely Acosta
Celebración Pastor
Rev. Frank Acosta
Celebración Pastor
Dr. John Wayne McMann
Executive Pastor
Rev. Bryan Moore
Pastor
Rev. Janet Stilwell
Pastor

FMC Discernment Task Force

John Ankoviak – *Chair*
Charmaine Aydelette
Rob Aydelette
Alma Bigler
Tim Bigler
Mary Beth Oglesby
Row Oglesby
Oscar Rodriguez
Danilo Vasquez
Randy Walker
Wanda Walker