

**Discernment Committee Report**  
**Collierville United Methodist Church - Collierville, TN**  
**Presented to CUMC Administrative Board – December 4, 2022**

**INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

Since 1972, the United Methodist Church (UMC) has been debating biblical and theological interpretations of human sexuality which additionally has caused a plethora of governance and polity issues within the UMC. It seems the church has come to a theological impasse. It also seems to be a growing interest within the denomination that the best course of action is a gracious separation. Several plans for separation have been proposed to try to provide a healthy theological home for those who significantly differ in their understanding: traditionalists (those who welcome LGBTQ+ persons but who wish to prohibit marriage and ordination of persons in same sex relationships); progressives (those who advocate for full inclusion, including marriage and ordination of persons in same sex relationships), and centrists (those who allow for differences of opinion).

Having shared these groups, we ask for your understanding and forgiveness acknowledging that these terms are an oversimplification of reality. However, they are currently the best way to summarize the opinions and options that have emerged to date. We recognize that within these groups and even within individuals within these groups exist more nuanced viewpoints. There is a little deeper explanation of these groups in the appendix.

Several years ago, Collierville UMC Sr. Pastor, Rev. David Atkinson, began informational and listening sessions in preparation for and after the 2019 Special Called session of the General Conference held in St. Louis, MO that was thought would bring the issue to a conclusive decision once and for all and to put an end to the disagreement.

However, the progressive and centralist Big Tent and other proposals failed and the existing traditionalist language in the Book of Discipline against full inclusion of homosexual persons sustained though the vote was very close. Not only was the existing language of the Book of Discipline affirmed, but penalties were established for Pastors and churches that defied the language.

The 3 paragraphs in the Book of Discipline that pertain to this issue are:

**¶ 304.3 Qualifications for Ordination** - While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals<sup>1</sup> are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

**¶ 161.C The Nurturing Community - Marriage**—We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

**¶ 341.6 Unauthorized Conduct** - Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

## **PARAGRAPH 2553 ~ Disaffiliation of a Local church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality**

Considering what seemed oppressive punishment to Pastors who disobeyed the Book of Discipline in this regard to the progressive side of the church, Paragraph 2553 was approved by the 2019 Special Called General Conference to allow churches who disagreed with the current 2016 Book of Discipline's human sexuality stance of the UMC to gracefully depart the denomination.

Initially, several progressive churches disaffiliated from the denomination. However, a few months later and over time, 26 of the 53 U.S. Annual Conferences failed to adjudicate pastors and churches who violated the human sexuality paragraphs of Book of Discipline. (Note our conference, the Tennessee Western Kentucky (TWKUMC) conference, has not had any reported incidence to adjudicate.) Additionally, General Conference that was scheduled for 2020 was postponed to 2021 due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. Again in 2021 General Conference (GC) was postponed till 2022 for the same reason. In 2022, GC was once again postponed citing delegates were still facing vaccination, Visa, and travel issues and the new time for GC would not be scheduled for 2023 but rather in 2024. In light of paragraph 2553 expiring the end of December 2023 prior to the newly scheduled GC in 2024, many churches felt they needed to take action if they wanted to disaffiliate. There is no proposed legislation to extend the language to do so.

**Note:** See **APPENDIX** at the end of this report for steps and timelines for this process.

## **THE PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION AND GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION**

In the summer of 2019, Bishop John Yambasu (Sierra Leone Episcopal Area) invited persons from three constituencies within The United Methodist Church – traditionalists, centrists, and progressives – to meet and share ideas about the future of The United Methodist Church and how we might navigate the persistent conflict experienced by the denomination. It was understood from the beginning that this was an ad hoc group of people without official authority who shared a deep love for the church as well a significant desire to see if a mediated solution could be proposed. Renowned Mediator Kenneth R. Feinberg, who is Jewish and had no vested interest in the outcome, volunteered his time and expertise to the group in an attempt to create a mediated proposal for a solution to the impasse we were facing.

A group of 18 people, 8 of which were Bishops, created legislation to propose to the upcoming 2020 General Conference. It is called the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation. They proposed restructuring and separation as the best means to resolve our differences, making provisions for The United Methodist Church to move forward as two or more separate entities, each of which remains true to its theological understanding while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person. This proposal was crafted in recognition of the regional contexts and divergent points of view within the global United Methodist Church and as a faithful step that maintains the possibility of continued cooperation around matters of shared mission and interest, enabling each of us to live out our faith authentically.

They felt the alternative to implementing the Protocol is likely to result in further conflict, loss of churches and members, and litigation, all of which have occurred in other denominations dealing with similar conflicts.

The group envisioned a new future for the people of The United Methodist Church to avoid further harm to one another, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) United Methodists and their families and friends, as well as further harm to the church universal and to those with whom we strive to share

the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They sought to move away from the caustic atmosphere that has often marked conversation in The United Methodist Church and to move into a new season where we set one another free as we send each other into our respective mission fields to multiply our witness for Christ.

Early this year, 5 of the 18 signatories of the Protocol proposal withdrew their support, and in addition the UMC announced that General Conference would not take place until 2024. Frustrated, many traditionalist groups banded together to launch a 2<sup>nd</sup> Methodist denomination the Protocol recommended and goes by the name of the Global Methodist Church.

## **COLLIERVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (CUMC)**

In late 2021 members of our congregation began to express concerns over the issues going on within the UMC denomination to the Pastoral Staff and Lay Leadership leaders of the church.

The Leadership Council & Vision Team discussed the issues in early spring of 2022 and decided a Discernment Team was in order to help explore the matter and prayed over the names of members who they felt are equipped to participate on the team.

May 22, 2022 the issue was brought before the Administrative Board for a formal motion which was made to form an “Ad Hoc (vs. Standing) Discernment Committee with the goal **“to help our Congregation understand better who we are and what we think as a whole or in parts around the theology and governance of the United Methodist Church with names of committee members to be brought before the Administrative Board for approval”**.

The Lay Leadership Council & Vision Team recommended 12 Lay members and 8 alternates be considered along with the 3 Pastors on Staff, and that 3 Lay members be elected from the floor of the Administrative Board. The 18 members were selected/affirmed at the June 5<sup>th</sup> Administrative Board meeting. The committee began meeting June 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Note:** See **APPENDIX** for the list of team members.

## **DISCERNMENT TEAM ACTIONS**

- We launched a website, which served as a central location for our discernment team to share relevant resources to help each of us better understand this complex issue and what it means to CUMC. We shared videos, articles, and other resources in an effort to provide insight, but not representing any implied position of the Team. This page has been an evolving platform, where it has been updated as we walked through this journey together. We encouraged the congregation to take the time to watch the videos and read through the information to be prepared for small group discussions, surveys.
- We provided a Discernment Team email mailbox so that members could send us questions and express their feelings and recommendations.
- August 28<sup>th</sup> - We held a Church Wide Educational Meeting – Speakers from the conference to share the latest from The United Methodist Church, plus a representative to speak the history of who The United Methodist Church has found itself at this juncture and on the Global Methodist Church. Over 300 persons were in attendance.
- We published weekly eNewsletter articles, along with special weekly prayers.

- September & October we conducted 16 Listening Sessions in Sunday school classes and small groups along with 4 open forums with over 300 persons in attendance.
- Oct 17-31<sup>st</sup> – We held a churchwide member survey that was launched via email and text message. We took steps to provide awareness to our members through pulpit announcements, new letters, and listening sessions to encourage our members to update their contact information ahead of time. Out of 1755 members notified, 804 or 45% responded.

## **SUMMARY OF TRADITIONALISTS, PROGRESSIVE, & CENTRIST VIEWS**

**Note:** See **APPENDIX**

### **LISTENING SESSION & SURVEY COMMENTS OBSERVATIONS**

There were numerous things almost everyone held in common, such as a deep and abiding love for this church and for one another. It was clear that no person wanted to hurt anyone else and that everyone seeks to know and love God and others. Everyone emphasized a strong commitment to our mission and ministries and many who disagree with each other agree and in fact do serve side by side in our mission and ministries and are in deep relationship with each other in classes and groups.

The results of our work confirmed that we are a much more diverse congregation than many of us would have assumed given the traditional nature of our church and its geopolitical location.

We have come to see that traditional and progressive represent two different ways of viewing Scripture, and both sides feel frustrated and silenced. Everyone agrees that Scripture is our primary source of authority. However, we disagree on the very nature of Scripture itself. Some individuals view Scripture as inerrant while others view it as inspired, and the underlying assumptions of each of these perspectives result in different interpretative possibilities. Thus, two people, each embracing Scripture as their primary source of authority and after much study and prayer, can come to very different interpretative conclusions because they hold different foundational assumptions about Scripture itself. Regardless of one's assumptions about Scripture itself, all interpretation requires discernment and prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us.

People of all views agree that there are non-negotiables, such as the virgin birth, Jesus is Lord, and love is the greatest commandment of all. One's understanding of homosexuality is important and it has consequences for life together as a community of faith, but it is not a foundational tenet of our faith.

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

- See official "Election Buddy" Survey Results in separate pdf file for Questions 1-16, including Question 17 (comments section responses).
- See **APPENDIX** for survey results laid out in a PowerPoint by the Discernment Team.

## **CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION:**

The Discernment Team is bringing forth a recommendation tonight that has been informed by three areas:

1. Quantitative data collected from our survey,
2. Qualitative comments from the Listening Sessions, and
3. Over 200 qualitative comments shared in the last question of the survey.

Our report covers both those who favor the recommendation and those who do not favor the recommendation. The team and your pastors felt that it was vitally important at this crossroads in the life of our church to hear both reports on the recommendation.

Here are the main points that inform the recommendation ...

1. For the 3 paragraphs that pertain to human sexuality in the Book of Discipline → 67-69% of the survey respondents agree with the language as it is currently written. These views fall in line with the traditional views in the summary above.
2. 49% responded that they would vote to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Denomination. 32% said they desire to remain United Methodist, with 19% undecided.
  - a. From the Listening Sessions and Survey comments it is thought that there are many reasons for the discrepancies between 49% and 67-69%. Many of our members do not want to leave our church as we know it. All love our church and don't want to "lose" our church and the people we connect with in worship, ministry, and mission.
3. Recently five Jurisdictional Conferences of the UMC were held in early November throughout the United States. Out of 13 newly elected Bishops, there were no new traditionalist Bishops elected. This adds to the concerns that Bishops and other church leaders will continue to violate the Book of Discipline rather than follow it. For further reading on actions taken at our Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, go to <https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/17115217>.
4. So, from the survey data, we have a church that is 69% traditional in belief around the human sexuality issue, however, from the survey it appears a vote to disaffiliate would not be approved with 49% answering they would want to disaffiliate, and 32% answering they would not. It would take nearly all the 19% who responded undecided to change their mind to vote to disaffiliate for it to pass. This certainly makes it cloudy and complicated for the Discernment Committee to wrestle with the majority members being conservative. Most likely there is not the two-thirds in person vote needed to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Denomination.

Further analysis of numbers to stay or leave ... Out of 805 responses:

- If there is no vote to disaffiliate = 238 people (30%) said they will leave our church.
- Another 260 (32%) members said they will stay until General Conference 2024 to see what happens with any Book of Discipline changes.
- That could potentially be 498 (62%) people of 805 that will leave by May of 2024 if the Book of Discipline does become more progressive in its language.

Qualitative responses from the Listening Sessions and the comments section of the survey had many conservative responses with many expressing their desire to have a vote. These qualitative (interpretation-based) responses outweighed the quantitative (number-based) responses for many on the Discernment Committee. It was felt that the 13 on the Team, nor the roughly 50 persons on the Administrative Board, should hold back the church from having a vote. We believe a church member vote is necessary and would provide

transparency in the total process. It is also believed that this will allow for a personal peace for all with a final decision.

**Recommendation:** The Discernment Committee recommends to the Administrative Board that Collierville United Methodist Church start the disaffiliation process.

The vote was 11 for the recommendation and 2 against.

**Minority Report** - The recommendation from the discernment team is not unanimous.

1. According to the survey data, fewer than half (~48.8%) of the members of CUMC would vote to disaffiliate today. That support level is well shy of the ~66.7% support needed to disaffiliate. Another 19% or 154 persons are “undecided.” To reach the  $\frac{2}{3}$  threshold for a disaffiliation vote to succeed 144 (93.5%) of the 154 undecided members would have to vote for disaffiliation. This 17.9% difference is simply too large for disaffiliation proponents to overcome. Those who wish to remain with the UMC only need 1.4% more votes to not disaffiliate.
2. On the 3 paragraphs that pertain to human sexuality in the Book of Discipline → while 67-69% do support these prohibitions, that cannot be equated to a desire to disaffiliate which only received 48.8% support. Most likely this is attributable to CUMC members who agree with the Book of Disciplines prohibitions **but do not believe** that the **threat** of the LGBTQ+ prohibitions changing is worth disaffiliating from the congregation.
3. Considering **qualitative** data from the survey **comments** and listening sessions provides a bias in favor of those who are outspoken. This approach weighs every time a member might have voiced their concerns in a listening session and filled out the entire survey (questions #1-16) and wrote a comment at the end of the survey (question #17) equally, thus being “heard” three times. In contrast, focusing only on the 804 survey answers in questions #1-16, using only **quantitative** data, insures one voice, one vote.
4. Why does quantitative (numbers-based) data matter? If we move forward with a vote that might fail, because only 48.8% say they will vote for disaffiliation, then no matter how many parameters and pleas our leadership makes to the congregation, campaigning will most likely still take place. This will only hurt more and more persons in the process. Further dividing this church.
5. The possibility of losing 30% of our congregation if a vote is not held is a daunting one. Yet this is not a zero sum game. Similar processes are taking place in churches all around us. There are / will be people on both sides of the discernment conversation looking for new church homes now and in the future. As more churches go through and finish this process membership in all churches will stabilize.
6. 32% did state that they desire to wait to see what would happen at General Conference 2024. 53% then stated that they would leave if the Book of Discipline language was altered. There is no way to know what will actually happen in 2024. We should not let the fear of the unknown push us into a vote that only has 48.8% support at this time.
7. Financially our church is going to be impacted whether we do not take a vote (because 30% will leave) or we take a vote and it fails (32% state they will leave). Finances should not be taken into consideration as a result. Financial adjustments will have to be made regardless.
8. Let us take a different path and beginning conversations with those who desire to leave The United Methodist Church. Let us begin to talk about how we can help two churches succeed. Let us use our energies and passion to find ways to offer grace to one another. There are more options out there than allowing a vote to move forward that has to find almost 18% points to carry the day. Let us honor the last eight months of discernment of our team and congregation, and allow the quantitative data, the numbers, thus persons, to speak.

## **APPENDIX**

### **¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality**

1. Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.
2. **Time Limits** - The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.
3. **Decision Making Process** - The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.
4. **Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church** - If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. The terms and conditions, including the effective date of disaffiliation, shall be memorialized in a binding Disaffiliation Agreement between the annual conference and the trustees of the local church, acting on behalf of the members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:
  - a) **Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement** - The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶ 2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.
  - b) **Apportionments** - The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments.
  - c) **Property** - A disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. All transfers of property shall be made prior to disaffiliation. All costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.
  - d) **Pension Liabilities** - The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual

conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.

e) **Other Liabilities** - The local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.

f) **Payment Terms** - Payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure.

g) **Disaffiliating Churches Continuing as Plan Sponsors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits Plans** - The United Methodist Church believes that a local church disaffiliating under ¶2553 shall continue to share common religious bonds and convictions with The United Methodist Church based on shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, unless the local church expressly resolves to the contrary. As such, a local church disaffiliating under ¶ 2553 shall continue to be eligible to sponsor voluntary employee benefit plans through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits under ¶ 1504.2, subject to the applicable terms and conditions of the plans.

h) **Once the disaffiliating local church has reimbursed** the applicable annual conference for all funds due under the agreement, and provided that there are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against The United Methodist Church as a result to the disaffiliation, in consideration of the provisions of this paragraph, the applicable annual conference shall release any claims that it may have under ¶ 2501 and other paragraphs of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church commonly referred to as the trust clause, or under the agreement.

### **Members of the Discernment Committee of Collierville United Methodist Church**

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Amy Bradham       | 10. Jessica Nichols                               |
| 2. Mike Brewer       | 11. JD Peoples – Laity Co-Leader                  |
| 3. Preston Carpenter | 12. Kit Poe                                       |
| 4. Clayton Davis     | 13. Susan Smith                                   |
| 5. Betty Edmunds     | 14. Eric Ware                                     |
| 6. David Jackson *   | 15. Mark Younger *                                |
| 7. Kerry Johnson     | 16. Pastor: Eddie Bromley                         |
| 8. Bob Konsowitz     | 17. Pastor: Tondala Hayward                       |
| 9. John McCarty      | 18. Pastor: Deborah Suddarth – Pastoral Co-Leader |

\*Resigned during the process

### **Definitions: Traditionalists, Progressives, & Centrists**

#### **Summary of Traditionalists Views**

Persons holding a traditional view are concerned that decisions for the church are being based on culture or popular opinion. They desire that Scripture is uniformly interpreted in a manner consistent with the historic practice of marriage being between a man and a woman and with the view of homosexuality as a sin. They do not believe enough consideration is given to the dangers of misinterpreting God's word in the work done throughout the General Church.

Many are concerned about how to explain the LGBTQ+ reality to their children. There seems to be fear that becoming more open and inclusive will result in children becoming more permissive in their own sexual journeys, not because they were born that way, but because culture tells them they can do whatever they want. If CUMC were to become more inclusive, our traditionalists want to know how we will define our sexual ethics and on what basis. In general, there is a fear of the disintegration of the traditional family structure. Our traditional members want to be inclusive and loving of everyone while not encouraging licentiousness.

In addition to a strong view that Scripture condemns homosexual acts, there is a concern about a moral slippery slope and moral degradation if non-heterosexual orientations are blessed/encouraged. Our traditional members agree without question that all persons are welcome and loved, but also believe that the homosexual “lifestyle” should not be blessed or encouraged by the church. They believe that doing so would be bowing to cultural norms rather than following what Scripture mandates.

Traditional persons worry that they are no longer welcome to speak their views because it is seen as harmful/discriminatory. They feel hurt and experience deep grief over potentially losing their church home. Traditional members want to have room to maintain their scriptural viewpoint without being judged as hateful or discriminatory.

They further believe there is a divide between the views of those in leadership and the general membership. They would like more transparency in the views of the CUMC clergy/leaders. Those who hold traditional views are concerned that if CUMC becomes more progressive that church membership, finances, and missional impact will decline. There is a deep concern over how final decisions will be made and who will get a voice and a vote in the decision.

In sum, our traditional members believe that we are at risk of going against the Word of God in favor of the “spirit of the age” and that it is easy and tempting to get swept up in culture. They urge us to remain courageous and strong in our traditional beliefs arguing that homosexuality, where it is spoken of in the Bible, is always seen as a sin.

## **Summary of Progressive Views**

Persons holding a more progressive view emphasize following the example of Jesus in reinterpreting Scripture and in holding persons to the highest moral standards. This calls for holding LGBTQ+ persons, as we do all persons, accountable for the responsibilities and blessings of a Christian marriage. They do not view homosexuality as a sin and argue that even for those who do see homosexuality as a sin, it is illogical to single it out as the only “sin” that would prevent a person from being ordained. We are all sinners, including clergy, and it is unfair to cherry pick any one sin and elevate it above all others. As an example, we do not prohibit people who are divorced from ordination even though Jesus taught firmly about the sin of divorce but said nothing about homosexuality.

Our progressive members believe it is unchristian to hold a theology that perpetuates harmful discrimination in our community and in our world and that we have spent too much time trying to find a Christian and loving way to continue to “discriminate” against people who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Any theology saying homosexuality is a sin encourages discrimination and harm, even if unintentionally. This belief system has led parents to reject their children, a painful experience for both parent and child. It has led many LGBTQ+ persons to the point of despair and to a significantly higher than average suicide rate. Progressive members ask how can Christians claim to be loving and continue to contribute to this painful reality.

They argue that scientific evidence supports physical causes for differing sexual orientations, particularly the influence of hormones during gestation and birth and on brain and sex organ development. They conclude that if we affirm that all persons are created by God and are born with the image of God, “*imago Dei*,” then we cannot judge or exclude them for how they were born. They also highlight the reality of the presence of Christ and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the LGBTQ+. They conclude that if God has not rejected them as followers of Christ, then neither should we.

We should make ordination and marriage decisions using the same criteria we would for any other persons. Many of our progressive members believe that 20 years from now, it will become clear how Traditionalist’s views have, intentionally or unintentionally, contributed to discrimination and harm. Progressive people believe that traditional persons are sincere and well meaning, and unable (or unwilling) to see differently. Many who now hold more progressive views have themselves transitioned from more traditional views, and they are sympathetic because they know this to be a long and difficult transition. Being fully loved and affirmed means performing same sex weddings and ordaining openly gay homosexuals.

Discrimination they argue is especially hurtful when it comes from the church, which is supposed to be about love and grace. Jesus teaches love; and discrimination in any form is not love. They ask everyone to see how difficult it is on the LGBTQ+ person to be in a church that sends messages that they are not fully accepted and welcomed for who God created them to be. Because of the pushback, unacceptance, and hate crimes the LGBTQ+ community endure, they would not identify with and population that might believe that their lifestyle was a sin. LGBTQ+ persons find spaces elsewhere where they can be fully loved and affirmed. The LGBTQ+ community believes God loves all people, and they are created in the image of God. Our progressive members feel that LGBTQ+ persons will not feel fully welcome until The United Methodist Church becomes intentionally affirming.

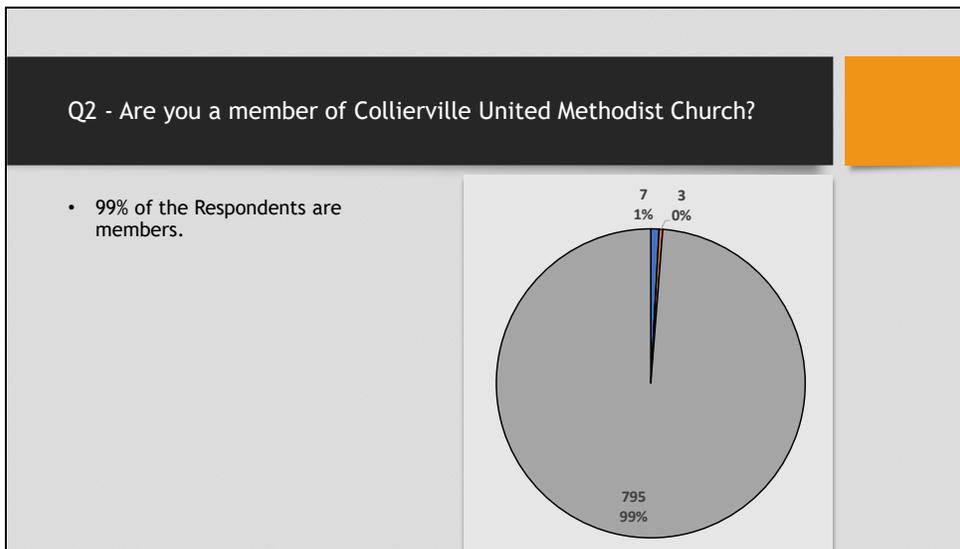
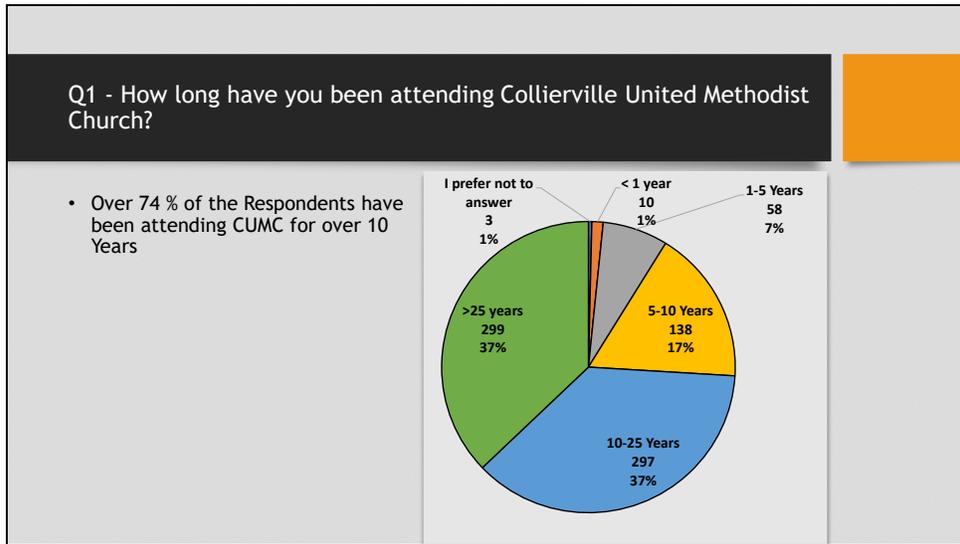
### **Summary of Centrist Views**

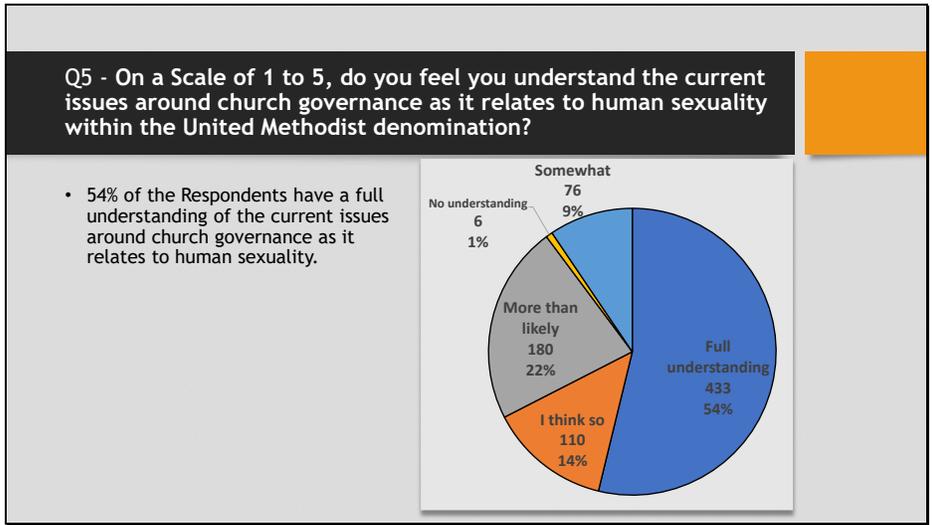
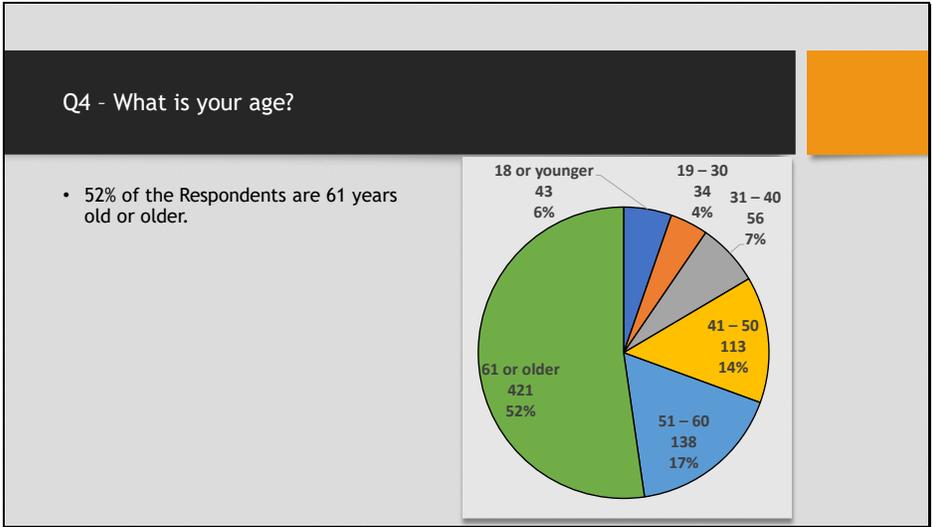
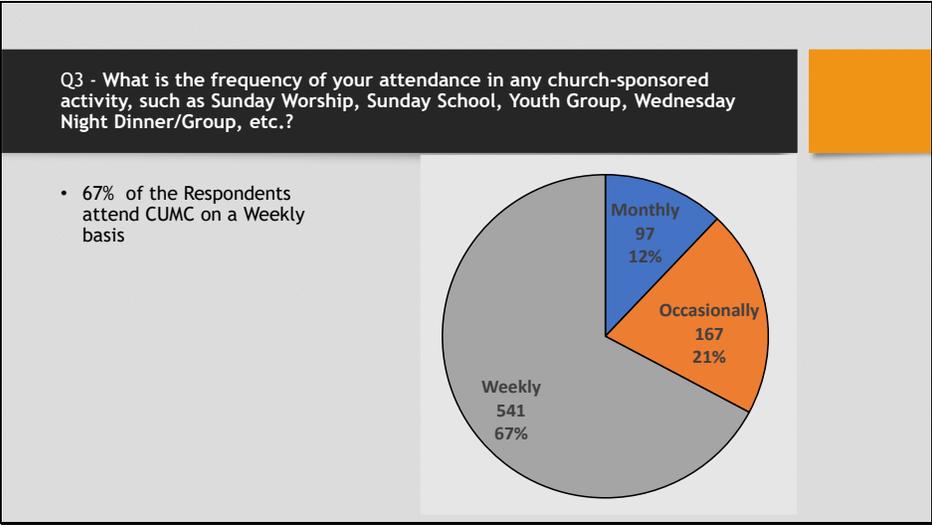
Being a centrist does not mean being devoid of an opinion. In fact, many centrists hold firm opinions and convictions. Our centrist members emphasize our human limitation and the need for humility. They tend to hold their theological views firmly yet humbly and believe that it is important to allow differing views because everyone is at a different point on a faith journey that integrates a myriad of factors into their understanding. Centrist people advocate for an atmosphere of mutual respect. They try to educate themselves on all views even as they hold their own. They are generally more open to change in the face of contrary evidence than either progressives or traditionalists.

Our centrist members hope that CUMC can remain a place of refuge for people of all views. They see that we have always been a theologically diverse congregation and we need to courageously “own” it. They believe that there has always been an abundance of grace for those who disagree with one another. Centrist persons emphasize our shared identity as children of God who are all seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Many centrists are comfortable with the messiness entailed in allowing for ambiguity and differences.

They believe the Living Word makes itself available to people of every age and that each age must seek anew to understand God’s Word. Each age is required to work out their understanding of the timeless eternal God from within their time-limited, finite existence. They believe that theology of every age must speak to lived experience or it will never be fully believed and followed; that it must connect people to the power of the Living God. Centrists do not like an attitude of “I am right, and you are wrong.”

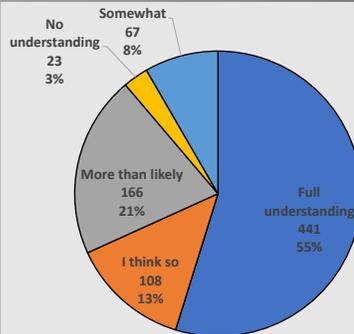
## PowerPoint Survey Results by Discernment Team





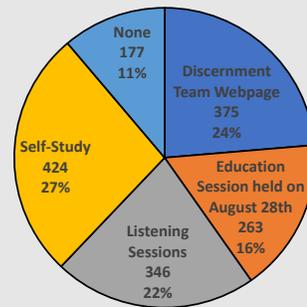
**Q6 - On a Scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Collierville United Methodist Church is in discernment?**

- 55% of the Respondents fully understand the reason why CUMC is in Discernment.



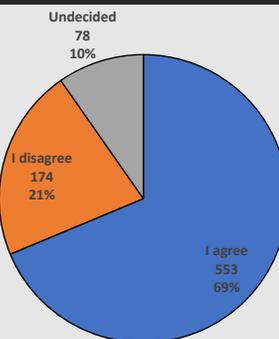
**Q7 - Did you attend or access any of the following? Check all that apply (or none)**

- 89% of the Respondents did some research or attended Listening/Educational sessions.



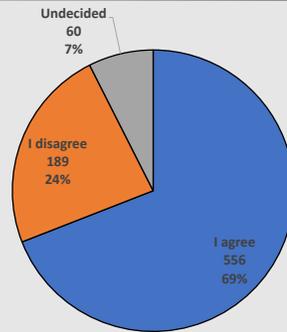
**Q8 - Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline states “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” Which of the following statements best describes your position?**

- 69% of the Respondents Agree that LGBTQ+ should not be ordained.



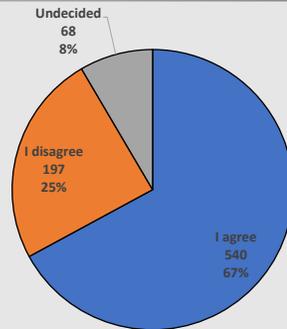
Q9 - Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

- 69% of the Respondents Agree that Marriage is the union between one man and one woman.



Q10 - Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline states, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions (weddings) shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

- 67% of the Respondents agree that LGBTQ+ unions (weddings) should not be conducted by our Ministers and not conducted in our Church.



Q11 - If Collierville United Methodist Church does NOT hold a vote to stay United Methodist or disaffiliate, which of the following statements best describes your position?

- If no vote is held to stay UMC or disaffiliate, 30% of the respondents will leave.

