

Discernment Session # 8, Weston UMC – March 7, 2021

This was the 8th session and final session of our Discernment Process. This has been a time to learn about what it is to be a United Methodist in this time of Methodism.

Today's topic was "**What's Up Now?**" The Revs. Hope Luckie and Adama Brown from the New England Conference's Open Spirit Task Force were our leaders. They brought us: information that was originally intended for district presentations in the spring of 2020, presentations that got sidelined by the pandemic; information about the cancellation of General Conference and some implications for the current UMC as a result; and a time to dream together on what the church could become, based on all that we have learned.

Reminder: We chose to do this study because we, as a church, wanted to be informed about the upcoming decisions for the future of the church, and to be able to make our own informed decisions about our future as a local church, following the 2019 General Conference actions. The process we used was based on RS-19-211 from the 2019 New England Annual Conference:

RS – 19 – 211 - NEW ENGLAND ANNUAL CONFERENCE PROCEDURE FOR LOCAL CHURCH/MINISTRY SETTING DISCERNMENT ABOUT DISAFFILIATION FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Because the 2019 Called Session of the General Conference approved the minority report for petition 90066, "Minority Report on Disaffiliation," and the Judicial Council ruled in decision 1379 (April 25, 2019) that the petition is constitutional as amended, and

Because this new paragraph in the *Discipline*, 2553, allows for a local church to disaffiliate from the denomination "over issues related to human sexuality," and states that "annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph," and

Because such a decision has significant impact on the local church or ministry setting, the community in which the ministry is located, the Annual Conference,

and the strategy and witness of the Church of Jesus Christ in contexts local and regional, and therefore must be undertaken with the greatest sensitivity to matters both spiritual and temporal,

Therefore, the New England Annual Conference approves the following procedure to be included in our Conference Policies and Procedures, governing the process and conditions for churches and ministry settings within New England in discernment about disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church:

1. Before a District Superintendent may call for a church conference for disaffiliation, the local church or ministry setting shall undergo a discernment period of no shorter than eight months.
2. During this discernment period, the local church/ministry setting shall seek assessments of the impact of this action upon the church, community, and Conference from *at least* the NEAC Trustees, Cabinet, Treasurer, Council on Finance and Administration, Chancellor, Benefits Officer, and the Conference Board of Congregational and Community Development evaluating the strategic missional impact of the church/ministry setting. These conference entities must make an initial response to the request within 30 days or will be deemed to not impede the discernment process of the local church. The church/ministry setting shall also develop a statement articulating their theological and missional foundations in seeking disaffiliation for reasons of conscience “related to human sexuality.” *
3. The local church or ministry setting shall hold a minimum of four listening sessions, advertised to and open to the full professing membership, at least two of which are also advertised to and open to those beyond professing membership, who participate in the ministries of the church/ministry setting. These sessions shall solicit the input of these constituents and shall report the findings of the assessments named in (2.) above. The sessions shall be facilitated by the District Superintendent or their designee, and may not be facilitated by the pastor, the hired or appointed staff, or any member or constituent of the church/ministry setting.
4. After the discernment period, the church conference, and an affirmative 2/3 vote of the professing members present, the Disaffiliation Agreement may be formulated in accordance with ¶2553, and shall include the recommendations and assessment from the Conference bodies named in (2.) above. It shall also

include provision for how the community previously served by the church/ministry setting shall be served by The New England Annual Conference moving forward.

5. When presented to the Annual Conference for a vote, the Disaffiliation Agreement must be accompanied by a full report of the outlined process, the assessments and recommendations named in (2.) above, a summary of the financial and missional impact to the community, conference, and wider Church of the assets and ministries under consideration, and a recommendation for how the community previously served by the church/ministry setting shall be served by The New England Annual Conference moving forward.