



Lea Joyner Memorial United Methodist Church
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Dear Friends,

Lea Joyner Church is currently facing a monumental decision about the future of our church: Whether we will remain United Methodist or choose to leave the denomination. This is not a decision that we take lightly, so the Church Council has authorized a Discernment Team to put together a process for every church member to learn about the issues and help us make our ultimate choice. This Informational Packet is part of that process.

Over the next couple of weeks, a neutral facilitator from Auxano (Mike Gammill) will lead us in three Town Hall meetings, help us administer a survey of our congregation, and create a report of his findings for the Discernment Team. We will then review these results with the Church Council, who will decide whether to call a Church Conference where every professing member of the church will be able to vote on whether or not we disaffiliate from the UMC.

To prepare ourselves for this monumental decision, I encourage everyone to do five things:

1. PRAY – Pray for God to guide us into the future he has prepared for us as individuals and as a church.
2. GET INFORMED – Read through this Informational Packet. I want everyone to be fully informed about the issues we are facing so we can make the best possible decision for our church at this time.
3. ASK QUESTIONS – If you have questions after reading the Informational Packet, please seek out me or anyone else on the Discernment Team. While we cannot answer every question, we can hopefully point you in the right direction to get the answers you seek.
4. ATTEND A TOWN HALL – We want every active member of our church to attend the Town Hall meetings we have scheduled on October 6 & 7. This will be an opportunity to hear presentations from a neutral facilitator and have small group discussions with church members over the issues we are facing. I believe these meetings will be very helpful to us as we discern our future.

5. VOTE – Every member of the church who is present at the Church Conference will be able to vote on whether or not we remain in the UMC. We want to hear from everyone so that we can make the best possible decision!

Know that I am praying for our church through this discernment process. I pray that God will use this difficult time to help us determine the kind of church we wish to be in the future, and even more: to have the strength to become the people he is calling us to be.

In Christ,

Pastor Ben McGehee

Reasons to **STAY AFFILIATED** with the UMC

Historic Connections

- Lea Joyner Church has been a UMC congregation since the denomination began in 1969.
- Lea Joyner Church has long established partnerships with local and global UMC ministries that span decades of investment and impact.
- The UMC is an established denomination with a defined reputation worldwide for proclaiming God's love and doing social good.

Inclusive Culture

- The UMC has a deep culture committed to welcoming all people.
- The UMC can reach a broad diversity of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and lifestyles with its "Big Tent" approach to ministry and theology.
- The UMC has a proven track record of positive community impact through its local church and denominational ministries like UMCOR.

Big Tent Theology

- The UMC will likely change its current policies to allow for the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons and the officiation of same-sex weddings in local congregations. Annual conferences and local congregations would be free to set their own rules regarding these issues in keeping with the "big tent" culture.
- The UMC is committed to being a welcoming culture for all regardless of where they fall on the theological spectrum, from traditional to progressive.

Financial

- Staying in the UMC would cost nothing additional other than the ordinary annual apportionments we currently pay (around 10% of our General Fund income).

Reasons to **DISAFFILIATE** from the UMC

New Opportunities

- Lea Joyner Church would have the opportunity to become an independent congregation or join another new denomination more closely aligned with the kind of church we are discerning God is calling us to be.
- Lea Joyner Church would have fresh connectional opportunities with local and global ministries that could stimulate new growth.
- Lea Joyner Church would have an opportunity to establish a new reputation in our area, distinct from the UMC.

Compassionate Culture

- Lea Joyner Church would be free to maintain a welcoming culture committed to historic Christian beliefs and practices without creating confusion due to questions about when and how and why the UMC is considering changes to the beliefs and practices currently in the UM Discipline.
- Lea Joyner Church would be free to move on from the long-standing denominational debate over human sexuality to focus on mission and ministry.
- Lea Joyner Church would be free to determine our own governance and policies based on our culture, mission, and vision.

Traditional Biblical Theology

- Lea Joyner Church would be free to seek a denominational affiliation and mission partners aligned with an understanding of, and commitment to, a traditional view of scripture and Christian practice.
- Lea Joyner Church would be able to align with a denomination that is willing and able to hold leaders accountable when they do not adhere to that denomination's accepted beliefs, statements, or actions.

Financial

- If Lea Joyner church votes to disaffiliate by a margin of 2/3, the UMC will release all of our land, facilities and assets from the "trust clause", allowing the church to control our future direction while retaining all of our land, facilities, and assets .
- Future "apportionments" would be determined by any specific denomination our church decides to affiliate with, but may be less than what we currently pay to the UMC, thus allowing more money to be spent on local church mission and ministry.

A Timeline of the Discernment Process For Lea Joyner Church

In order to help us prepare for our monumental decision, here is a quick timeline of what we are planning to do, along with a few options of what might happen if we continue down the path towards Disaffiliation.

Step One: Read the Informational Packet

Please read all the information contained in this packet so you can better understand the process and the issues and make an informed decision.

Step Two: Attend a Town Hall Meeting

We are holding 3 Town Hall meetings:

Thursday, October 6 @ 6:00pm (Nursery available)

Friday, October 7 @ 12:00pm

Friday, October 7 @ 6:00pm (Nursery available)

While you are welcome to attend as many meetings as you wish, each person only needs to attend one, as the same information will be presented to the large group and the same questions will be asked in the small groups. Our goal is to get at least 165 people in attendance between all 3 meetings.

Step Three: Take the Survey during Worship

On Sunday, October 9, we will allocate time during both worship services for people to take a survey about their opinions on the future of our church. This survey will be sent via email as well, and will remain open for a few days so those who aren't in worship that day can participate. We encourage every member of our church to take the survey.

Step Four: The Church Council Will Decide Our Next Steps

The Church Council will meet on October 16 to review the information from the discernment process and make a decision on whether to hold a Church Conference this Fall, wait until the Spring, or not hold a Church Conference at all.

Next Steps If the Church Council Decides to Move Forward This Fall:

Church Conference – Last few days in October

Special Called Annual Conference to Ratify our Decision – November 12

Potential Disaffiliation Date – December 31, 2022

Next Steps If the Church Council Decides to Wait Until Spring:

Church Conference – Sometime before May 15

Annual Conference to Ratify our Decision – June 21-23, 2023

Potential Disaffiliation Date – June 30, 2023

Next Steps If the Church Council Decides Not to Hold the Church Conference:

Lea Joyner will remain United Methodist

Frequently Asked Questions about Discernment and Disaffiliation For Lea Joyner Church

What is Disaffiliation?

A vote for Disaffiliation means we desire to leave the United Methodist Church. A vote against Disaffiliation means we desire to stay in the United Methodist Church.

Why is Lea Joyner considering Disaffiliation?

There are numerous reasons our church is considering disaffiliation, including:

1. The likelihood that the UMC will change its position on homosexuality to allow practicing homosexuals to become pastors and for churches and pastors to celebrate homosexual weddings.
2. The fact that some Bishops and Annual Conferences in the United States (though not Bishop Harvey or the Louisiana Annual Conference) have publicly stated that they will not enforce the current prohibitions in our United Methodist Discipline regarding homosexuality.
3. Our desire to be free of the restrictions in the UMC Trust Clause so that we will have full control over the future direction of our church while retaining all of our land, facilities, and assets.

What is the current UMC stance on homosexuality?

The United Methodist Church affirms that sexuality is “God’s good gift to all persons” and that “all people are of sacred worth and are equally valuable in the sight of God.”

Since 1972, the UMC has affirmed that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” The UMC has also maintained long-standing restrictions regarding homosexual clergy and weddings. Pastors may not be “self-avowed, practicing

homosexuals” and may not conduct ceremonies that celebrate same-sex weddings or unions. Such ceremonies also may not be held on church property.

For more information, see [What is the Church's position on homosexuality? \(umc.org\)](https://www.umc.org/what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality)

What are the proposed changes to the UMC stance on homosexuality?

There are many proposals being considered, however, most of them involve removing the “incompatible” statement, allowing homosexuals to be pastors, and permitting pastors and churches to celebrate homosexual weddings.

If the rules haven’t changed yet and Louisiana is currently enforcing the rules we have, why is Lea Joyner considering Disaffiliation at this time?

The next General Conference of the UMC (a worldwide gathering of UMC delegates) will be held in 2024, and we expect changes to occur at this time. However, the current method for disaffiliation expires on December 31, 2023, and it is unlikely that a similar disaffiliation plan will be passed after the current one expires.

The current method for disaffiliation was passed by the 2019 General Conference and can be found in Paragraph 2553 in the UMC Book of Discipline. In 2021, the Louisiana Annual Conference passed our version of the 2553 plan.

Here is the text of Paragraph 2553 from the Discipline:

[Book of Discipline: ¶2553. Disaffiliation over Human Sexuality \(umc.org\)](https://www.umc.org/Book-of-Discipline-%E2%99%A22553-Disaffiliation-over-Human-Sexuality)

The Louisiana 2553 Process can be found in the 2021 Journal on pages 254-262:

<https://louisiana-email.brtapp.com/files/2021conferencejournalb.pdf>

Note that one change was made from the proposal in this report, as the 45% property assessment was removed. You can see this change in the minutes of the Annual Conference session printed on pages 71-72.

What is the Financial Cost of Disaffiliation?

If Lea Joyner disaffiliates in the Fall of 2022, we will owe \$175,725 to the Louisiana Annual Conference.

This number was determined by using the process outlined by paragraph 2553, with additions from the Conference Board of Trustees. Under Louisiana rules, churches disaffiliating under paragraph 2553 in Louisiana must pay:

1. The rest of the current year's apportionments, plus an additional two years of apportionments.
2. The church's fair share of the unfunded pension liability as determined by Wespath (the UMC Pension Agency) and allocated by the formula developed by the Conference Board of Trustees.
3. Any arrearages in pastoral pension or health benefits.
4. Other costs as determined by the Conference Board of Trustees (including loans from the Conference, etc.)

How will we pay for the cost of Disaffiliation?

Lea Joyner currently has over \$200,000 in reserves that can be used to pay the disaffiliation cost. Using these funds, however, will deplete most of our reserves, so we are also accepting donations directly for the disaffiliation costs. We are also pursuing the Employee Retention Credit (ERC) program through the Federal Government, which may result in \$40,000-60,000 being granted to the church next year.

Also: Due to some restrictions the Conference has placed on one of our accounts (the proceeds from the sale of the parsonage in 2016), we will likely need to take on a short-term loan to cover around \$50,000. After our Disaffiliation Date, the restrictions will be removed and we can pay off the loan in full using some of that parsonage fund.

If we hold a Church Conference, who can vote?

Any professing member of the church who attends the Church Conference in person is eligible to vote. Those who are unable to be present cannot submit a proxy vote, nor can anyone vote electronically.

What is the voting threshold to disaffiliate?

At least two-thirds of the professing members who attend the Church Conference must vote to disaffiliate for the measure to pass. While we want as many members as possible to come and vote, there is no minimum number required to reach a quorum. Whoever is present at the meeting constitutes a quorum.

What will happen if we vote to disaffiliate?

If the vote for disaffiliation passes, our Trustees will begin the legal process of transferring all assets into the name of the new church entity we will create. We will also begin exploring our next steps as a church, including whether we affiliate with another denomination or become independent. If we disaffiliate, Lea Joyner will continue to serve people in the Monroe area, just as we have always done.

What will happen if we vote to stay in the UMC?

If we remain in the UMC, Lea Joyner will continue to serve people in the Monroe area, just as we have always done.

What will happen to our current members who disagree with the results of the vote?

Our hope is that everyone will continue to be a member of Lea Joyner Church, regardless of the results of the vote. We understand, however, that some people will choose to join another church that more closely aligns with their beliefs, and this saddens us.

What will happen to our current pastors after the vote?

If Lea Joyner Church votes to leave the UMC, Pastor Ben and Pastor Betty plan to leave the UMC as well, so they can continue serving at Lea Joyner Church.

What are our denominational options if we vote to disaffiliate from the UMC?

Most of the churches in Louisiana who are disaffiliating are considering 4 options:

1. Independent
2. Global Methodist Church (<http://globalmethodist.org>)
3. Free Methodist Church, USA (<http://fmcusa.org>)
4. Evangelical Methodist Church (<http://emchurch.org>)

Will we have to change our name if we disaffiliate?

Yes, but only somewhat. We will no longer be “United” Methodist and must remove all references to the UMC from our signage and church building. However, we can still retain “Lea Joyner” and “Methodist” in our church name. While the final name has not been determined, one suggestion is “Lea Joyner Methodist Church”.

How would Rev. Lea Joyner vote on disaffiliation?

Many people ask this, but the truth of the matter is that: We don’t know. Rev. Joyner did not face the question of disaffiliation at any time during her ministry, so it is impossible to determine how she may have voted, given the possibility.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about Rev. Lea Joyner:

1. Rev. Lea Joyner was part of three different denominations as a minister: she was ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church in 1939, planted Southside as a Methodist Church in 1952, then joined the United Methodist Church during the merger in 1969.

2. Rev. Lea Joyner remained in the Methodist Church, even when she was told by her District Superintendent: “no one wants you” as their pastor.
3. Rev. Lea Joyner steadfastly loved everyone and preached strong biblical sermons about turning from sin and growing closer to God in our lives.

Where can I learn more information?

There are numerous sources of information about the current situation in the United Methodist Church. Please note that not everything you can read on the Internet is helpful or even truthful. While no site is perfect, we recommend investigating the following websites:

Louisiana Conference – <http://la-umc.org>

UM News – <http://umnews.org>

Good News Magazine – <http://goodnewsmag.org>

Wesleyan Covenant Association – <http://wesleyancovenant.org>

Who Are the Discernment Team Members?

The Discernment Team members helped put together this Informational Packet and make plans for the Town Hall Meetings and Congregational survey. They are available to answer any questions you might have about the process:

Paula Burgess

Cyndy Hardaker

Peggy Meredith

Steve Pickering

Sam Wiersma

Rev. Betty Swanson

Rev. Ben McGehee