

Dear Members of Wilmington Island UMC,

As you are probably aware, WIUMC's vote regarding disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church will occur on **January 8, 2023**, following the **10:00 am** worship service.

The District Superintendent has provided us with the following information regarding the voting process:

At the conclusion of the 10 am worship service, everyone will leave the sanctuary, then line up to come back in, sign in, and receive a ballot. There will be four sign-in stations divided alphabetically. **There will be no absentee, proxy, or early voting.** Those who show up to vote will make the decision for the congregation and if an individual's name is not on the membership roll, that person may not vote. Once all voting members have signed in and received a ballot, the called conference will convene. A recording secretary for the called conference will be elected and the ballot and voting process will be explained. After the call for the vote, the ballots will be collected and counted. The District Superintendent has requested assistance from the lay leader, church council chair, and trustees chair in the counting of the votes and certifying of the votes and numbers. After the votes are certified the results will be announced.

The decision to disaffiliate must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church **present** at the church conference. **If you sign in and receive a ballot but then choose to abstain, that action is counted as a "no" vote.**

Please note, the ballot wording below does not mention the bigger issue of the theological divide between traditionalists and progressives. The Conference wrote the wording for this ballot and while congregations have asked for the language to include the larger "theological divide," the Conference chose to include only the presenting issue of human sexuality.

**The ballot you will receive will be worded as follows:**

South Georgia Church Conference of the United Methodist Church  
Chatham County, Coastal District  
January 2023

Shall Wilmington Island UMC disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church for reasons of conscience over disagreements related to human sexuality, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues, and following disaffiliation, shall

Wilmington Island UMC be known as (*Name to be decided*) and all real and personal property of Wilmington Island UMC be titled in (*Name to be decided*)?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES

\_\_\_\_\_ NO

There will not be a discussion time prior to the vote. If you have questions regarding this issue, members of the discernment committee will be available to answer questions after the worship service on **Jan. 1, 2023**. Additional information regarding this issue is also included below.

The discernment committee unanimously recommended disaffiliation after study, discussion and prayer. Church Council unanimously voted to accept this recommendation and to request this called conference to vote on this matter. We believe it is in the best interest of our church to disaffiliate from the UMC. Going forward, our church as we know it will not change. Our Christian faith and beliefs will remain what they have been since we began as a church family in 1959. We will continue to uphold our mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ by inviting, incorporating, nurturing, and serving.”

We ask that you be in prayer for wisdom and guidance for our congregation during this time.

Yours in Christ,

WIUMC Discernment Committee

### **Additional Information**

#### **Why is Wilmington Island United Methodist Church considering disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church (UMC)?**

- There are irreconcilable theological differences in the UMC. We see the denomination becoming increasingly accepting of clergy, including bishops, who denigrate the authority of Scripture and deny the Divinity and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, along with other key tenets of the faith. These theological disagreements have led to decline and dysfunction in the UMC and are a distraction to our mission.
- The ongoing conflict over foundational principles and theological divisions within the UMC have intensified over the last few years. The presenting issue has been human sexuality (Biblical definition of marriage and ordination of self-avowed practicing LGBTQ+)

persons), but the real and much bigger issue involves our doctrine and theology as Wesleyan Methodists, and, particularly, the authority of Scripture.

- While the Book of Discipline (BOD) has not changed to date, there are bishops and clergy not abiding by its rules. Due to the structure of the UMC, regional jurisdictions do not have the authority to act against infractions of the BOD that take place in another jurisdiction.
- We are seeing a shift in the denomination away from the mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” towards a focus on inclusiveness and social justice without preaching a Gospel that says we are all sinners in need of the grace of Jesus Christ in our lives.
- This divisiveness has existed for over 50 years and the General Conference of the UMC has not been able to resolve this conflict. The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, which was supposed to be voted on in 2020, has now been postponed again until 2024. In addition, one-third of the bishops who originally supported this protocol have now withdrawn their support, making ratification unlikely.

### Why Now?

- The opportunity for disaffiliating from the UMC will expire Dec. 31, 2023. It is unknown if the option will be available after that date or what the terms of such an option would be.

### How much will it cost?

- Payment of any unpaid apportionments for the current year plus PLUS full twelve months of future apportionments (we will pay all current year apportionments by year-end).
- Our clergy’s compensation and benefits through the date on which disaffiliation is effective.
- Payment of the local church's share of the total pension liability of the Annual Conference. This amount is based on market rates and will not be confirmed until April 2023.
- We do **NOT** have to purchase our property, the deed will be transferred from the Conference to our congregation once all requirements are met. Per Conference policy, “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, including any costs or fees incurred by the Annual Conference in connection with the disaffiliation, shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.”

Pension Liability (Valuation 6/1/22)	\$147,004.35	this number won't be confirmed until April 2023
Current Year Apportionments (minus ytd payments)	\$0.00	
Additional year of apportionments	\$54,000.00	
<u>Legal Fees, signage changes, etc.</u>	<u>\$5,000.00</u>	
maximum est costs	\$206,004.35	

### Other Key information

- Disaffiliated churches may elect to be independent or elect to join another Methodist denomination. Our church intends to affiliate with another Methodist denomination and a committee is currently studying all available options,
  - Other Methodist denominations include: Global Methodist Church, Free Methodist Church, Congregational Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan Church
- Once disaffiliated from the UMC, a local church may not use the word Methodist in their name unless they affiliate with another Methodist denomination.
- Once disaffiliated, all cross and flame symbols must be removed from the property, except for the hymnals.

### Discernment Process for WIUMC

- Discernment team created in Spring 2022.
- On July 17 and July 27, 2022, WIUMC held Town Hall meetings to share with the congregation information regarding disaffiliation.
- In August 2022, Church Council notified District Superintendent Rev. David Thompson that Wilmington Island UMC is considering disaffiliation.

- An informal meeting with DS David Thompson was held on October 12, 2022. Rev. Thompson explained the disaffiliation process and answered questions from the congregation.
- On October 15, 2022, eleven church members and the pastor traveled to Epworth by the Sea for the Isaiah 43 Conference to learn more about the disaffiliation process as well as the Global Methodist Church.
- On Sunday, October 23, Rev. Baxter Hurley, senior pastor of Forest Hills Church in Macon and former associate pastor at WIUMC, gave a presentation to the church members explaining Forest Hills' path through the disaffiliation process. Forest Hills disaffiliated in August 2022.
- On Monday, Oct. 24, 2022, Church Council voted unanimously to request the District Superintendent to hold a called church conference for the purpose of voting on disaffiliation from the UMC.
- On Wednesday, December 14, 2022, a letter notifying the congregation of the date of the vote was mailed to each member of the congregation.

#### **Discernment Team Members**

Bill Long (chair)

Andy Anderson

Rick Long

Greg Barker

Diane Reeder

Charlotte Carpenter

Jim Rayburn

Kathy Restel