

# ***THE WAY FORWARD***

DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION | 2023

**DISCERNMENT GUIDE**





# ***THE WAY FORWARD***

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

**ISAIAH 43:18-19 NIV**



With regard to denominational discernment, I can't think of a more fitting Scripture to frame the moment we are experiencing right now: letting go of past divisions and theological misalignment within the greater United Methodist denomination while reaching for new opportunities to partner with God now and for decades to come. He is doing a new thing!

**Jeff Kersey**  
Senior Pastor



Please join 40 Days of Prayer, as the church discerns its next steps in ministry.

[mthorebumc.com/separation-prayer](https://mthorebumc.com/separation-prayer)

# WHAT?

Due to the ongoing divisions within The United Methodist denomination, Mt. Horeb joins other United Methodist congregations across the nation in considering its future affiliation based on core values and theological beliefs.

Our Way Forward Team, pastors and lay leadership have been studying the options to determine the best path forward:

- Stay in connection with The United Methodist Church
- Separate from The UMC and affiliate with a new or different Methodist denomination

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: **SEPARATION**

Denominational discernment is a multi-step process that prepares the congregation for a decision to stay or part ways with the greater United Methodist denomination.

Mt. Horeb's Way Forward Team and administrative council is recommending separation from The United Methodist Church in order to preserve the church's traditional, theological heritage and to advance the church's ministry forward into the future.

At this time, future affiliation options are still under consideration. A complete recommendation for the best way forward will be presented to the congregation after the congregational vote and approval from the South Carolina Annual Conference.



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# WHY?

For decades, leaders in The United Methodist Church have been distracted and divided by disagreement regarding Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, sexual ethics, and the definition of marriage. Where practices deviated from church doctrine as outlined in Holy Scripture and *The Book of Discipline*, the denomination has suffered from a lack of accountability and enforcement.

## **THEOLOGICAL MISALIGNMENT**

Today progressive theology is fast becoming the prevailing standard within the United Methodist denomination. Separating has many advantages, which are described in the next few pages. More importantly, it allows us to fulfill our mission without interruption or redirection by progressive agendas currently being set by some United Methodist leadership.

## **SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY**

Mt. Horeb is committed to upholding the traditional, apostolic witness of Holy Scripture as authoritative in all matters of faith and practice. The historic Christian faith, as documented in the Bible, offers a transforming relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be replaced, reinvented or rewritten by individuals who seek to make a different version of personal truth, morality and understanding of righteousness.



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## **PRESERVATION OF MISSION**

Founded on the traditional, evangelical and theological principles of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, Mt. Horeb's mission has not changed in the 30 years since its inception:

### **Make, Mature, and Mobilize disciples who Magnify Jesus Christ**

Through separation, Mt. Horeb seeks to strengthen and advance its current role within traditional, Wesleyan Methodism by

- Fulfilling its original mission
- Advancing its heritage as a leading Methodist congregation; serving both as a standard-bearer of orthodox Wesleyan theology and an example of robust worship and ministry programming
- Equipping future generations of traditional, Wesleyan leaders for ministry

## **FULL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

Separation will release Mt. Horeb from The UMC's property trust clause — a historic, universal claim made by The UMC and written into the church's articles of incorporation in an effort to retain ownership rights to church property. Mt. Horeb will be released from this claim upon a final vote for separation by the South Carolina Annual Conference.

## **HUMAN SEXUALITY**

At Mt. Horeb, discernment and affiliation decisions are focused on the primary matters of scriptural authority in regards to marriage and human sexuality. We believe in celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage, with marriage being defined between a man and woman. Mt. Horeb relies on the Scriptures and what orthodox Christians have always believed about God to guide all matters of human relations, including sexual ethics.

# WHY NOW?

Mt. Horeb has a limited window to take action before United Methodist leadership and policy could change.

## **NEW BISHOP**

Presiding Bishop of the SC Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, Jonathan Holston, is assigned until the end of 2024. A new bishop could be much more progressive in theology and practice.

## **REVISED MISSION**

A new senior pastor could be appointed to Mt. Horeb with a revised mission and ministry focus. Existing worship and programs may be redesigned in a more progressive direction. Church culture and community climate may shift.

## **LIMITED TIMING**

Bishop Holston and the board of trustees have given a March 1, 2023 deadline to complete this process. If not completed by March 1, the process will be delayed until 2024. There is a concern that when the General Conference meets in 2024, this separation process may no longer be available or may be more difficult and expensive.

## **HIGHER COSTS**

A smaller UMC, following widespread departures of more traditional congregations, means there are fewer churches left to fund operations of the continuing United Methodist denomination. To date, 2000+ churches have already disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church. This could result in large budget cuts or higher apportionments for remaining congregation.

# WHEN

## **SEPARATION VOTE IN FEBRUARY**

Members of Mt. Horeb are called to participate in a vote to separate from The United Methodist Church in late February. Specific information and instructions will be published on the church website as they become available.

## **AFFILIATION RECOMMENDATION**

Mt. Horeb seeks to advance its connectional Wesleyan heritage; however, it is too soon to determine a specific affiliation pathway for the future.



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# PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

Church, I invite us all to prayerfully seek God's preferred future for Mt. Horeb United Methodist Church. As a prayer driven church, we've been incredibly blessed by God's promises and provision throughout our history together. It's truly amazing how God has taken a small struggling congregation on the corner of Foxglen and Old Cherokee and grown the church into the largest United Methodist Church in South Carolina and one of the largest in Methodism. To God be the Glory! As we pray for God's preferred future, we do so with confidence and courage.

The key to Mt. Horeb's fruitfulness will be a direct result of our continued faithfulness to God's Holy Word, to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Mt. Horeb will continue to be a church with strong Biblical convictions and compassion. Our mission to make, mature and mobilize disciples who magnify Jesus Christ will not change. The church we have been - the church you have grown to love - will continue to be the same church moving forward.

**Jeff Kersey**  
Senior Pastor

As a cradle United Methodist, I have loved and served this denomination for many years. This past summer, I was ordained as a deacon in The UMC and made vows to uphold the doctrines of the Church and defend against other dogmas that are contrary to God's Holy Word. While it is heartbreaking to watch the denomination in which I received my calling stray away from the truth of Scripture, I look forward to what is ahead for Mt. Horeb. It is my hope and prayer that we will continue to be a church that is welcoming and grace-filled, while also being grounded in the authority of God's Word.

**Emma Murphy**

Congregational Care Pastor



It is with profound sadness that I say that it is time for Bible-believing congregations to consider leaving the United Methodist Church. For over fifty years, I have been an ordained pastor in The UMC. My father and grandfather were Methodist preachers. I have seen God do many great things through the UMC. In chapter 17 of John's gospel, Jesus prayed for unity in the church, but if the church cannot agree on the authority of Scripture, it has no basis for unity. In both the Old and New Testaments, we read: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8, 1 Peter 1:24-25)

Our Methodist founder, John Wesley, had one standard for determining Christian truth. He taught that "the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church."

The major tragedy of The UMC is that many clergies and some laypersons have gradually stopped believing these words from The United Methodist Book of Discipline: The Holy Bible "is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice." (Article IV, Paragraph 104)

Many professors in our seminaries teach that Holy Scripture contains outdated and unenlightened beliefs that modern, emancipated people should disregard. Some seminary students are encouraged to pick and choose which parts of Holy Scripture they would believe and preach. Gradually the seriousness of sin is no longer taught; sin has become a forgotten word in many sectors of the Church. The Cross is



no longer necessary if sin is not the big problem. Therefore, the truth of Jesus dying on the Cross for our sins begins to vanish from our Methodist literature. Though much of the controversy in recent years has raged around sexual morality (especially homosexuality), the real issue is the authority of Scripture.

God never leaves himself without a witness. I believe that a new Methodist Movement is being birthed. It is solidly based on the authority of Scripture and is fervently evangelistic. I pray that God allows me to be a part of that great new thing He is creating.

**Rev. Dr. Bill Bouknight**  
Retired UMC Pastor

Every Christian generation must decide how to navigate the tension of being faithful to Scripture while contextualizing the message of hope. I believe it is possible to maintain orthodox belief while cultivating a posture of compassion. I'm happy to be serving at a church who trends in both directions. We did not actively look for this challenging conversation, but we are equipped to handle it with grace and truth. Who knows? Perhaps we have been positioned for such a time as this.

## **Chad Myers**

Adult Discipleship Director

*For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

**ESTHER 4:14**



# ALIGN

## **THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES**

Mt. Horeb upholds the Bible as the authoritative source for guidance on all matters of the Christian faith. Mt. Horeb and its pastors share this traditional theology and are not aligned with progressive perspectives and practices that are becoming more common throughout The United Methodist denomination.

## **MT. HOREB'S POSITION ON THE BIBLE**

The Bible is God's Word written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the final authority for determining our Christian beliefs and how we are to live.

Mt. Horeb does not align with a leading UMC pastor, Adam Hamilton, who separates sections of the Bible into three "buckets" — one that revealed God's will and still does, another one that revealed God's will at the time but no longer does, and those parts of the Bible that never revealed God's will. Mt. Horeb does not align with relativistic views of the Holy Scriptures as inspirational stories, good poetry or myth.

## **MT. HOREB'S POSITION ON JESUS CHRIST**

Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God. He lived a sinless human life and died on the cross to atone for our sins. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven and will return to Earth.

Mt. Horeb does not align with some UMC bishops, clergy, and most United Methodist seminaries that question the divinity of Jesus, don't believe He died for sins and don't believe He has the power to fully transform lives. We don't align with those who believe that Jesus is one of many ways to God. Mt. Horeb does not align with those in our denomination who have stopped talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because, "it does damage to people," or Bishop Karen Oliveto who said, "We shouldn't create an idol out of Jesus" and that, "Jesus had bigotries and prejudices."



## **LEARN MORE**

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# DISCERN

## **LISTENING SESSIONS**

Church members are invited to join us for a discernment overview and panel discussion with pastors and lay leaders in our church.

## **ADVANCED REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED**

Pre-registration is required at each session to keep the gatherings more personal. Childcare is available at select sessions.

## **ADVANCED QUESTION SUBMISSION**

We want to be adequately prepared to answer your questions, so please submit them in the form field included on your registration form. We will do our best to get to all submitted questions.

## **CHURCH WIDE MEETING**

In this meeting, all financial costs and other requirements of the Agreement to Separate and ramifications of separation will be presented and discussed. Church members will be allowed to discuss with the panel any further questions or concerns.

## **SESSION 1**

Sunday, January 22  
3:00-5:00 PM

## **SESSION 2**

Wednesday, January 25  
6:30-8:00 PM

## **SESSION 3**

Tuesday, January 31  
7:00-8:30 PM

## **CHURCH WIDE MEETING**

Sunday, February 5  
5:00-7:00 PM

# DECIDE

## **CALLED CHURCH CONFERENCE**

A called Church Conference with member vote will be scheduled in late February. Please visit our website for more information.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

*Multiplying Methodism: A Bold Witness of Wesleyan Faith at the Dawn of the Global Methodist Church*

By Jeff Greenway

*Are We Really Better Together? Revised Edition: An Evangelical Perspective on the Division in The UMC*

By Rob Renfroe and Walter Fenton

*For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body*

By Timothy C. Tennent

*Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church*

By William J. Abraham



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United Methodist Seminaries

Western elects  
Cedrick Bridgeforth as bishop



United Methodist bishop denies  
essential truths of gospel

The Resurrection of Jesus and  
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A Personal Introduction





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