

Discernment Covenant and Timeline Agreement
Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church
North Alabama Conference

Question for Discernment: What is God calling our church to be?

Goals:

- To understand the vision and mission of this congregation.
- To understand the implications of remaining a part of the United Methodist Church.
- To understand the implications of withdrawing from the United Methodist Church.
- We will work to understand the many and varied issues that have developed or are developing in the UMC related to theology, human sexuality, fiscal challenges, and governance.
- To better understand the will of the congregation.
- To provide an opportunity for members of the congregation to become more informed about the implications and to be able to express their views on the issues.
- To develop a recommendation to the congregation that is acceptable to as many members of the congregation as possible.
- To discuss the issue openly, tolerantly, and flexibly in a spirit of Christian fellowship.
- For members of the congregation to individually consider what they believe and why they believe it.
- To engage as many members of the congregation as possible in this process.
- For the church to be stronger by the end of this process.

PHASE 1: Notification (Minimum 1 month)		
Step	Action	Date(s)
	A "Think Tank" was assembled to begin gathering information.	February 2022
1	Established a Discernment Team comprised of 12 lay members of the congregation. (Appendix A)	April 2022
2	Discernment team members have met and will continue to meet with representatives of various churches and denominations to learn about options.	February 2022
3	Notified the District Superintendent of the intention of VHUMC to enter into a period of discernment.	June 2022
4	Discernment Team met to determine the discernment process/model and timeline to be approved by the District Superintendent. The Team, along with the senior pastor, chose Bishop Wallace-Padgett's Principles for Discernment.	6/20/22
5	Meet with the District Superintendent to establish the covenant and timeline for ministry assessment and discernment.	June 2022
6	Notify all church leadership and employees of the discernment process and timeline as approved by the District Superintendent.	6/7/22 6/30/22
7	Notify the congregation of the discernment process and invite participation of all members through intentional prayer, meeting participation, and individual vote, if called.	6/7/22

PHASE 2: Prayerful Discernment (Minimum 3 months)		
Step	Action	Date(s)
8	Request the church liability calculations from Conference Treasurers Office.	7/1/22
9	Create and share the link with the congregation to a library of resources.	8/3/22
10	The Discernment Team presents the Discernment Covenant and Timeline Agreement with the congregation.	6/30/22
	Discernment Team created and launched a section on VHUMC website for all discernment material.	8/3/22
11	Discernment Team begins weekly section in The Notes which are distributed to entire congregation. The first installment begins with an invitation for members of the congregation to join a special prayer team which will focus on prayers for the church during this process.	7/21/22
12	Prayer and Fasting period began with a special Prayer Service.	8/10/22
13	Discernment Team will perform an analysis of pros and cons related to remaining part of the UMC.	
14	Discernment Team will perform an analysis of pros and cons related to withdrawing from the UMC including possible options.	
15	Discernment Team will work to understand the many and varied issues that have developed or are developing in the UMC related to theology, governance, human sexuality, fiscal challenges, etc.	Ongoing
16	Discernment Team will work to understand the various options being taken by churches who are withdrawing from the UMC.	Ongoing
17	Hold a number of Information & Listening Sessions in August & September.	
18	We will provide information to small groups, Sunday school classes, individuals, and families to share, listen, and discuss.	Ongoing
19	Share information through the Notes and/or E-Blast Emails.	Ongoing
20	The Discernment Team will make their final recommendation to the Church Council.	
21	If the recommendation is to withdraw from the UMC, the Church Council will then vote in support or denial of the recommendation.	
22	The Church Council will hold a meeting to share the final recommendation with the congregation.	
Action Steps below will only take place if the recommendation is to leave the UMC.		
23	If the Church Council votes in support of a decision to withdraw from the UMC, the pastor shall request a date from the District Superintendent for a called church conference in order for the congregation to vote.	
PHASE 3: Church Conference		
Step	Action	Date
24	Request and receive consent and agreement of date, time, place, and exact decision called for in a vote for Charge Conference from District Superintendent.	
25	Provide notice to all members of the congregation at least 10 days, including two Sundays, prior to the called Church Conference. Notice must be given in at least two ways.	
26	Hold a Church Conference conducted by the District Superintendent. All are welcome, but only members on the church roll may vote.	

PHASE 4: Finalize Withdrawal		
Step	Action	Date
27	Finalize all payments before the Annual Conference session at which the closure agreement is presented.	
28	Continue as a United Methodist Church until Called Annual Conference and the Bishop, majority of Cabinet, and the Annual Conference supporters vote and sign all appropriate paperwork.	12/10/22

Note: Highlighted yellow above are required by the Bishop. This agreement has been approved by the district superintendent.