**U.M. Disaffiliation Update 12/10/2023**

*Written and given by Rev. Melany A. Chalker*

*at First United Methodist Church of Eaton Rapids*

As the year comes to a close, as United Methodists, so does a transition of disaffiliations. If you are a guest reading this, you may not be familiar, but as a faith family of United Methodists, we have been through over 50 years of turmoil over theology relating to LGBTQ friends and neighbors.

A portion of our denomination has made the decision to birth a new more conservative arm of Methodism called the Global Methodist Church. With their breakaway, a disaffiliation process was laid out by our General Conference, our worldwide gathering of United Methodists.

It included guidelines of paying up back Ministry Shares, pensions, health insurance, and other responsibilities agreed to in our connection, before disaffiliating and moving their membership to another denomination.

In so doing, congregations who continue to struggle with the greater United Methodist Church’s desire to welcome all people, including our LGBTQ friends and neighbors,

into full inclusion in our churches and ministries, are able to remove themselves from the United Methodist denomination and either join the new Global Methodists,

another Methodist cousin like Free Methodist, or become an independent church with no greater affiliation.

The Michigan Annual Conference held a special Corporate Session on November 30

to accept any final disaffiliations for United Methodist churches in the Michigan area before the December 31 deadline.

62 churches requested and were approved for disaffiliation at this session, in addition to 58 churches who were approved for disaffiliation at last June’s Annual Conference session, and 8 churches who were approved for disaffiliation prior to 2023. This has been a several year process. **That is a total of 128 disaffiliations from United Methodism in the Michigan area.** This is not our first as United Methodists. We have gone through similar situations with disagreements on inclusion of Blacks, women, and more.

Only 3 requested disaffiliations in our district at the current session: Hardy UMC, Lansing Mount Hope UMC, and Manchester Sharon UMC.

Prior to 2020, the Michigan Area had 748 United Methodist Churches, so **that leaves 620 churches wanting to remain United Methodist, welcoming all people into our sanctuaries, ministries, and the life of the church.** **We, here at FUMER, are one of those churches.**

With just 17% choosing to leave in our state, we feel confident that God is not through with United Methodism in our state. Last spring, our Leadership here at FUMER,

made a conscious choice to not take a vote for disaffiliation.

You may remember reading about it in this year’s Annual Report. We have that right. Many churches chose not to vote. **Our leaders made that decision based on over 160 years of this church always welcoming every person who walks in our doors. The question that was asked was this: “Why would we choose to do anything different than that, now?”**

By not voting, we don’t have to declare winners and losers. We don’t have to decide what families and individuals are staying and which are leaving. Instead, we will continue to be a fully inclusive church with theology running the gamut. We will continue to listen to one another, hear each other’s views, and not condemn one another for having a different view than our own.

**In the midst of our Open Minds and Open Hearts, we will continue to have Open Doors.** As your pastor, I thank you for following Jesus’ example and carrying on a legacy of love, to all. Staff, members, and their families with LGBTQ loved ones,
thank you as well.