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sent to transform lives, communities, and the world.



March 15, 2023

To the Professing Members of Hope First United Methodist Church:

On 12/5/2022 I received notice that your church desired to enter a period of discernment about whether or not to seek disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church under the authority of ¶2553 of *The 2016 Book of Discipline*. For the past three months, you have had a chance to take part in three listening sessions, had a chance to look over many related documents, and have been in prayer and discussion as you discern the way forward God is calling your church to now take.

On 3/13/2023 I received notice that at the last listening session a poll was taken in which a majority of your church's professing members present and voting at the meeting voted in favor of requesting that I authorize your church to hold a church conference in order to consider the motion found below. Having reviewed all the records, I certified completion of the discernment process and authorized the Hope First United Methodist Church to hold a church conference on 3/29/2023 at 6:00pm for the sole purpose of adopting or rejecting this single non-amenable motion by the membership of the Church Conference:

For reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church related to these issues that follow, we, the Hope First United Methodist Church, under the authority of ¶2553 of The 2016 Book of Discipline, choose to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, and in accordance with ¶2529 of The 2016 Book of Discipline we authorize the church's Board of Trustees to act on the church's behalf to complete and implement the disaffiliation agreement with the Arkansas Conference Board of Trustees.

I will serve as the Presiding Elder of the conference. There will be opportunities for presentations to be made both by those in favor of disaffiliation and those in favor of remaining United Methodist before any vote is taken. Only the professing members of your church, your appointed pastor, any retired ordained ministers, retired diaconal ministers, or clergy in extension ministry who have elected to hold their charge conference membership in your church, and deacons who have named this charge conference their secondary appointment will be allowed to speak during the conference or to participate in the vote, which will be taken by written ballot, using a form I have provided to your pastor. Only these persons may vote in this Church Conference. Others in attendance may observe but may not speak or vote.

¶2553.3 of *The 2016 Book of Discipline* states the following: *The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church 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 disaffiliation is affirmed by a two-thirds majority of the professing members of the local church present and voting at this duly called church conference (¶2553.3; Judicial Council Decision 1379) the process may move forward. If the two-thirds majority is not reached, this process leading to disaffiliation ends, and your church will remain United Methodist.

It is important to note that an affirmative vote on the motion before the church conference will not mean that the church is therefore immediately disaffiliated. Rather, it will simply authorize your congregation's Trustees to complete a [standard disaffiliation agreement](#) with the Arkansas Conference Board of Trustees. Upon the Conference Trustees' recommendation, this Agreement will then be presented to the next Regular or Special Session of the Arkansas Annual Conference, where a simple majority of Annual Conference members present and voting shall be needed to ratify the motion for disaffiliation, contingent upon all provisions of the agreement being fulfilled before the release of claim can occur.

As I mentioned in a previous letter when I invited you to the first listening session, this is a momentous time in the life of your church, and the vote taken at this church conference will be perhaps the most important in your church's history. Every effort is being made to ensure that this church conference will be held in a fair and transparent manner. I hope you, as a professing member of the church, will make every effort to attend this conference so your voice can be heard through your vote, and I trust you will be in prayer during the coming days as you listen to discern God's will.

I look forward to meeting with you at the upcoming church conference.

Sincerely,

Rev. Ann Ferris, Southwest District Superintendent