

Cameron First United Methodist Church Discernment Process  
August 3, 2022

Introduction:

*“Discernment is a period of understanding the congregation, hearing from your membership about their hopes for the future and determining where God is calling our church. This process is grounded in information, communication, and prayer.”*

On July 18, 2022, the Administrative Board of Cameron First United Methodist Church (FUMC) made a motion which passed unanimously to enter into a period of discernment. *This period is intended to involve all church membership into deep reflection, prayer, and conversation regarding FUMC’s ongoing and future denominational affiliation.* This decision has been communicated to the District Superintendent and to the church by public announcement on July 24, 2022 and by subsequent physical and electronic mail.

The Pastor was charged with developing an appropriate process for discernment in consultation with resources provided by the Texas Annual Conference and elsewhere. The goal of this process is to position ourselves – individually and as a community – to hear and respond to God’s ongoing and future will for Cameron FUMC.

This process will result in the church taking one of two paths forward. Based on conversations, concerns, and insights gathered throughout the process, the Pastor and/or the Administrative Board may vote to *either*

- (1) move to conduct a church-wide vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church and subsequently affiliate with a different denomination, *or*
- (2) take no further action thereby remaining with the United Methodist Church.

In the case of the latter, a church conference will be scheduled, and the voting process would be conducted by the district superintendent. The process, as outlined in this document, will take a minimum of 40 days of prayer and discernment from the motion of the Administrative Board to a church conference vote for disaffiliation.

### **Outline of Strategic Discernment Process:**

#### **I. Prayer**

*Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*  
*-Philippians 4:6-7*

Discernment begins with prayer. Prayer can be both private and public. Membership is encouraged to bring Cameron FUMC and the United Methodist Church (UMC) in general into prayer at all opportunities throughout our discernment period. Membership is encouraged to do so in these three particular ways:

##### **a. Weekly Prayer Prompts**

The Pastor will produce weekly prayer prompts for anyone who would like to receive them. These will most easily be delivered by electronic mail. Members can sign up to receive these prompts by going to [www.cameronfumc.com/discernmentprayer](http://www.cameronfumc.com/discernmentprayer) on a computer or mobile web browser. Physical copies of these prompts can be mailed upon request to the church office.

##### **b. Group Prayer**

Members should place Cameron FUMC and the UMC on weekly and occasional prayer lists, such as at Sunday Worship, Sunday School groups, etc.

c. Private Prayer

Members are, of course, encouraged to pray individually for the church throughout this process. Consider seeking prayer from neighbors, co-workers, and family as well.

**II. Large Group Gatherings**

*“For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”  
-Matthew 18:20*

Discernment happens together. Whatever decision will come from this process is a group decision. Therefore, group conversation and insights are necessary. Membership is encouraged to participate in these group opportunities for discernment throughout the Strategic Discernment Process.

d. Town-Hall type informational Meetings

The dates of these two meetings will be August 4<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm and August 7<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm. All members are expected to attend one of these two meetings to receive information about the state of the United Methodist Church, what has led to this discernment period, and where we intend to go from here. The meetings will also entertain initial questions and concerns from attendees.

e. West District meeting of the Future Discernment Task Force of the Texas Annual Conference

The Future Discernment Task Force (FDTF) has organized meetings in every district of the Texas Annual Conference (TAC). The West District meeting is scheduled for August 13<sup>th</sup> at Christ Church in College Station from 2:30pm-4:00pm. Membership of Cameron FUMC are welcome to attend, and leadership is strongly encouraged to attend.

f. Church Gatherings

Each different church gathering (Sunday School, Methodist Men, Senior Cards, etc.) is encouraged to set aside one meeting to consider the implications of the church’s ongoing and future denominational affiliation related to their particular group. Leaders of these groups should inform the Pastor so he can be present to help guide the conversation and field questions and concerns.

**III. Small Group Feedback and Listening Sessions**

*“They who ‘walk after the Spirit’ are also led by him into all holiness of conversation.”  
-John Wesley*

Listening to the congregation’s concerns and questions about the future of our church will be critical to this process. Therefore, members are expected to participate in one of these small group feedback and listening sessions. Every professing member of Cameron FUMC will have the opportunity to formally and personally express their thoughts and views as a part of this discernment process.

To implement the Small Group activity, signup sheets will be made available for the members of the congregation to sign up and register. At these meetings, participants may comment on their thoughts/ideas about the Strategic Discernment Process, ask questions, and/or simply make a statement about their concerns and hopes for the future of Cameron FUMC.

The following are the guidelines defining these sessions.

- 1) Pastor Mark and/or Conference Lay Delegate Jerry Bethel will be present at each session. If neither can be present, the session will not be held in an official capacity and the participants should not consider their voice or concerns heard as a part of this discernment process.
- 2) The sessions will have no more than 8 participants or 3 households (not including the Pastor and/or the Lay Delegate), whichever results in the greater number of individuals.

- 3) Each session should be held at a host's home. The host may prepare as much or as little as they desire. While host homes are encouraged, the church building will be made available as an option.
- 4) The sessions will begin promptly at their set time and will last no longer than 1 hour unless extended by the Pastor or the Lay Delegate with the host's approval.
- 5) The dates and times for the first 15 sessions are set. If there is sufficient interest, more sessions may be added.
- 6) Sessions will be held in the spirit of holy conversation – participants will be respectful of each other in all manner of behavior, will not raise their voice, and will yield speaking time to others.

#### **IV. Personal Discernment Checklist**

*“One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.”  
-Luke 6:12*

Discernment happens individually too. To assist you in hearing and responding to God's word through this time, Pastor Mark is providing Personal Discernment Checklists to everyone. All members are encouraged to work through the list as much as possible and in all ways that are personally applicable. The checklist is ultimately for your private use. If insights come to you during your personal discernment, consider sharing them with your church gathering, your small group listening session, or in one-on-one conversation with the Pastor or the Conference Lay Delegate.

#### **V. Church Straw Poll**

In the week of September 12<sup>th</sup>, an online straw-poll will be conducted to anonymously gauge the overall feeling of the church membership. The straw poll will be another helpful factor in determining next steps at the end of our Strategic Discernment Process.

#### **Communicating information**

There are many resources and materials to be used for your discernment. Pastor Mark will share any information a church member requests to assist them in this discernment process and will also help gauge the accuracy and reliability of the information if it is in doubt. In addition, the following initiatives will be used to communicate information throughout the Strategic Discernment Process:

- 1) Town-Hall type Meetings (Aug 4 & Aug 7)
- 2) FDTF Meeting (Aug 13)
- 3) Small Group Sessions
- 4) Administrative Board Report from the Pastor at August Meeting
- 5) Church Council Meeting in September
- 6) Weekly Prayer Prompts (beginning Week of Aug 1)
- 7) Weekly Email Updates from Pastor Mark (Beginning week of Aug 7)
- 8) One-on-one meetings with Pastor Mark and/or Lay Delegate Jerry Bethell by request
- 9) Other educational information, literature, videos, etc. may be shared with the congregation by various means.

#### **Financial Impact of Affiliation**

At the August meeting of the Administrative Board, Pastor Mark will suggest that the church create an ad hoc committee to investigate the financial implications of our ongoing and future affiliation. This will include the cost to disaffiliate from the UMC as well as the cost of remaining in the UMC. Persons interested in joining this committee should express interest to Pastor Mark by August 11<sup>th</sup>. This information, when gathered, will be communicated to the church and reported to the Administrative Board for consideration.

**Collecting questions, comments, and concerns**

At any time and for any reason, a question, comment, and/or concern may be sent to the centralized collection point: [cameronfumc@gmail.com](mailto:cameronfumc@gmail.com). They may also be submitted in writing to Pastor Mark or the church office. Anonymous submissions cannot be guaranteed to receive a response.