

AFFILIATION DISCERNMENT INFORMATION

TRINITY
METHODIST CHURCH

April 2024

Our relationship with Christ compels us into connection with our neighbors and fosters a deep need to make Christ known locally and to the ends of the earth.

Affiliation Discernment Information
Trinity Methodist Church in Ruston, Louisiana
April 2024

Discerning Trinity's Future

The following information was compiled by the Affiliation Discernment Committee (“ADC”) of Trinity Methodist Church of Ruston, LA (“Trinity”) pursuant to the directive of our Church Council at their December 5th meeting. The purpose of this document is to present information to the Trinity membership in preparation for the ADC gaining congregational input prior to making a Church Council recommendation. This information was compiled after the committee’s independent research, that was obtained from other churches that have gone through the process and a presentation from a Global Methodist Church Presiding Elder.

Background

In 2023, Trinity officially disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church (“UMC”). At that time, Trinity became an independent church with no designated denominational affiliation, with the understanding of following the Wesleyan tradition. During the disaffiliation process, there was discussion concerning whether Trinity should affiliate with another group or maintain an independent structure. This discussion included giving the process some time, and perhaps making a recommendation within a year of disaffiliation. In the interim, Trinity has maintained the Methodist name, heritage, theology, and local church structure as written in the UMC Book of Discipline of 2016.

The Church Council’s December directive appointed the committee with instruction to research potential affiliation options, gain congregational input and make a recommendation to the Council. The Committee is comprised of eight voting members. These are Jay Guillot, Chair; Valerie Costanza; Shelley Goff; Gary Stokley; Collin Wick; Benny Denny; Joe Bleich; and Windham Lee. Nonvoting informational advisor: Rev. Lamar Oliver.

Any and/or all these individuals are available to answer questions.

Committee Work

The ADC has met regularly since February 4, 2024. The members have been mindful of the gravity of its work and have earnestly prayed for our Lord's guidance. It has gathered a great deal of information on various Methodist denominations for potential affiliation in preparation for presenting this summary to the congregation to gain their input into the process. See Appendix "A" for comparisons.

Wesleyan Heritage

The Committee is and was made quite aware of the lengthy history of our church, dating back to 1884, of operating within a larger Wesleyan community as an essential element of Methodism. Trinity has an uninterrupted practice of maintaining connectionalism and accountability for the past 140 years. This history includes being part of the following Methodist denominations: 1884 – 1939 Methodist Episcopal Church South; 1939 – 1968 Methodist Church; 1968 – 2023 United Methodist Church.

The goal of the Committee was to evaluate the options available to our church, and present to the Council and congregation the most effective way to maintain our heritage and tradition, while enhancing and advancing the ministries of Trinity in the immediate future and for many years to come.

Overview of Considerations

Some of the key aspects reviewed have been the theological and cultural alignment of Trinity. Some of the topics that received great attention were policies on marriage and pastoral standards; the selection/appointment process of pastors; ownership of church property; the meaning of Wesleyan connectionalism; regional Church affiliations; the growth of our ministries; and financial sharing.

Options

After prayerful review of the options and much discussion, the ADC has concluded there are two primary options to consider. These are:

1. Affiliate with the Global Methodist Church ("GMC"); or,
2. Remain in our current status as an "independent" church.

Pivotal to these options is how best to maintain our Wesleyan Tradition/Methodist theology and practices, maintain more local autonomy, and create disciples while growing the church.

There were other options considered that the committee concluded did not fit Trinity's needs, including many that maintaining property ownership is not an option. See Appendix "A".

Frequently Asked Questions

(These are not presented in any supposed order of priority)

1. ***What is the position of our pastors?***

Answer: Reverends Doug deGraffenried and Michael Cloud are currently credentialed with the GMC. Each of our pastors will be available for questions and their positions during the informational meetings.

2. ***Will affiliation affect our pastors and staff?***

Answer: *see the answer to #1 above.* Clergy benefits are secured and will be maintained throughout any affiliation transition. The benefits transition would be seamless.

3. ***Does Trinity need/want a GMC affiliation?***

Answer: Our Wesleyan heritage includes the establishment of strong, connectional ties with other Methodist churches at the theological, pastoral, leadership, and congregational levels. By becoming an affiliated congregation, Trinity gains the opportunity to extend ministry reach and to share our theological, cultural, and organizational strength across the greater Methodism landscape and the greater Christian Church.

As a point of reference, the GMC's Trinity Provisional Annual Conference (formerly known as the Eastern Texas Conference) is holding its annual conference in June at First Methodist in Shreveport. They are expecting 1,200 to 1,500 delegates from Louisiana, Arkansas, and East Texas.

4. ***Why is Connectionalism important?***

Answer: If a congregation is not clear about who they are and what they believe, they have the potential to drift. Connecting themselves theologically to something bigger than just themselves will provide a mooring and anchoring. There is value in being connected with like-minded, like-hearted Methodists who are working together with accountability to advance the Kingdom of God, assuring the teaching and preaching of correct doctrine. There is early and

instructive biblical authority for the practice of accountability and review of theological issues when/if questions arose/arise. (Acts 15, verses 1-33)

For the laity, Connectionalism provides Trinity with a larger Wesleyan network for qualified credentialed pastors within an accountable system. Other benefits include leveraging services like the GMC's pastoral training that Trinity is currently using for lay leadership training, GMC sponsored church camps our youth will be attending this summer, a larger Weekend of the Cross network and other ministry opportunities that a connected network provides.

Wesley warned about isolation. He once said: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist, either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."

5. ***What has the GMC defined as the roles and division of responsibilities between local churches, annual conferences, and general conference?***

Answer: The GMC's governance is set up for local churches to have autonomy within their structure. Local churches such as Trinity would be empowered and expected to be the spiritual and relational growth centers for ministry in their own communities. The purpose of the regional conference is to help the local churches be effective in their ministry to their communities. The General Conference is the denominational legislative body comprised of bishops (without vote), clergy, and lay delegates for the purpose of creating new or modified church law. The GMC's convening General Conference will take place in September 2024.

6. ***How does joining the GMC affect Trinity's historic Methodist identity, while allowing for greater church autonomy?***

Answer: The GMC precisely aligns with Trinity's traditional expression of Methodism within a streamlined structure for autonomy and accountability.

Key Comparisons / Questions: Independent or GMC Affiliation

(Independent is referring to Trinity’s status as a Disaffiliated Church)

Independent – GMC Comparisons		
Topic	Independent	Global Methodist Church
How would Organizational Structure / Theology / Policy be maintained with the right checks and balances to prevent the UMC problems that developed?	Currently operating under the UMC 2016 Book of Discipline. Trinity would need to establish its own organizational structure, by-laws, policies, and statement of beliefs with the right checks and balances.	<p>Would adopt the GMC’s governance while having autonomy within a Wesleyan system / larger church network. Previous UMC issues have been effectively eliminated, including Bishop roles and life appointments, pastor selection and guaranteed appointments, and property ownership.</p> <p>The GMC is aligned to the philosophy of Trinity throughout its history. Its mission is “To make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly. In our worship, we desire to surrender to and be fully devoted to one God-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are passionate about what is important to God”.</p>
Role of Bishops	N/A	Bishops are term limited. Their primary role is to preach, teach, and defend the faith. They also uphold the order, doctrine and discipline of the church. Details about elections, terms, and roles will be finalized at the Convening General Conference in Sept. 2024.
How would pastors be sourced?	<p>Currently uncertain. Trinity is currently operating under the UMC’s 2016 Book of Discipline.</p> <p>Trinity would have to find and hire pastors on its own. UMC seminaries are not currently cooperating with disaffiliated Methodist churches.</p> <p>Churches that remain disaffiliated might become a source.</p>	<p>Presiding Elder consults with the local church to determine needs. Potential candidates are identified for the church, along with the church making recommendations which can be from outside the conference. Additionally, Trinity can have direct communication with seminaries. The local church meets with the interested candidates and chooses the one they believe is the best fit. The selected pastor also must agree to come. Clergy are appointed to indefinite terms. A pastor’s term is a mutual decision between the church and pastor, not the Bishop.</p>

Independent – GMC Comparisons		
Topic	Independent	Global Methodist Church
Pastor Qualifications / Standards	Trinity would create a committee like the current SPR to create its own independent qualifications and standards.	The GMC’s governance for pastor qualifications and standards would be used. The GMC will provide hands-on assistance in pastoral development.
How would Pastor succession be managed, especially for ones that stay a long time?	A lay committee like the SPR committee would have to work with the pastor on succession. Trinity could possibly nurture Associate Pastors to fill the role.	The GMC’s governance for sourcing pastors would be used. See notes on sourcing pastors above.
Control of Church Property	Trinity owns their property, there is no Trust Clause.	Trinity owns their property, there is no Trust Clause.
Risks	One of the primary concerns is the church could become “leader centric, not mission centric.” Evidence has indicated that this could result in the creation of large churches because the leaders/pastors have large personalities. Such churches could very well become leader dependent. Some of these churches have risen to great heights but fallen to great lows. A possible explanation is that the internal, lay leadership may “take sides” with the errant pastor, insulating him/her from other church members. All of this would take place without any theological oversight or accountability.	If major disagreements arise with the GMC, a church can leave the GMC with a 90-day notice and a simple majority congregational vote, with no penalties.
Can women serve as clergy?	Trinity will have to decide.	Yes
Pastor Qualifications	Trinity would have to decide.	405 - BASIC QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ORDAINED (Executive Summary) – Have a personal faith in Jesus Christ and be committed to Christ as Savior and Lord.

Independent – GMC Comparisons		
Topic	Independent	Global Methodist Church
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Practice responsible self-control by exhibiting personal habits that are conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all relationships, fidelity in a Christian marriage between one man and one woman, chastity in singleness... – Accept the authority of Scripture; be competent in the disciplines of Scripture, theology, church history and polity. – Be accountable to the church, accept its doctrinal standards, discipline, and authority.
Reaction to the phenomenon of mainline Protestant churches declining in North America.	Christianity overall is declining although non-denominational churches have grown over the past several decades.	The GMC is growing exponentially. One interesting reality of operating within the GMC is that Trinity would function in many ways as an independent church but have the resources and connection to the larger church.
What are the cost commitments?	There would be no apportionments to the larger church. However, it is anticipated that Trinity’s local costs would increase with added staff to cover the services that a denominations governance traditionally provides.	Currently member churches in the Trinity Conference (Louisiana, East Texas, and Arkansas) of the GMC are currently required to contribute 2.75% of their adjusted operating revenue (\$50,700 for 2023 numbers). This number is subject to change based on the approval of the conference as the conference gains clarity on the resources needed for its work. The GMC Discipline allows up to a maximum of 6.5% of a congregation’s adjusted operating income compared to the UMC’s 15%. In any event, this is drastically less than our previous apportionment with the UMC which was \$158,200 or 8.6% in 2023. The GMC has a streamlined organizational structure to minimize costs.
Can Trinity’s name be maintained.	Yes	Yes
Will an individual’s membership be affected?	No, if local governance on membership remains the same, there will be no impacts. Membership is recorded in Trinity’s local database.	Vows of membership are honored. Membership is recorded in Trinity’s local database. If Trinity affiliates with the GMC, members’ names would be recorded in that entity once the affiliation process is completed.

Independent – GMC Comparisons		
Topic	Independent	Global Methodist Church
How many churches are there?	The disaffiliated UMC churches like Trinity, are the only independent Methodist Churches. Most are currently deciding their future.	There are currently between 4,000-4,500 churches that have already joined the GMC. These numbers are increasing literally by the week as there are still churches from the UMC affiliating with the GMC. Local churches include First Methodist Shreveport, First Methodist Minden, and Lea Joyner Memorial Methodist.
What will happen to ministries we have supported such as the Methodist Childrens' Home, UMCOR, etc.	Trinity can continue to support them as a local church.	Trinity can continue to support them as a local church. The GMC allows local churches to decide where to allocate their resources.
How would the laity benefit?	The local church will decide.	Trinity's laity is already benefitting by having credentialed Wesleyan pastors, GMC guided lay leadership training, GMC sponsored church camps, etc. The GMC provides connectionism within a larger Wesleyan church network as Wesley intended with local autonomy.

The question: What is the best decision for Trinity Methodist Church long-term to maintain its rich history as a Wesleyan centered congregation and realize its full potential for Christ?

The following Appendices are included.

Appendix "A": Wesleyan / Methodist Denominational Comparison

Appendix "A"

WESLEYAN/METHODIST DENOMINATIONAL COMPARISON

<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Doctrine</u>	<u>Trust Clause</u>	<u>Bishops</u>	<u>Clergy Appt.</u>	<u>Apportionments</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>History</u>
United Methodist	Wesleyan w/ Lack of Accountability	Yes. Local church holds property for conference.	Elected for life	Yearly appointed by bishop w/some congregation input	7-15% of budget (varies by annual conference)	13 million members globally, 6.2 million in US, 30,000 church (2,000)	Founded 1968 via merger of denominations founded in 1784, 1800, and 1803
Global Methodist	Wesleyan; adds Nicene and Apostles Creed; more meaningful accountability	None Local Church Owns Property	Elected for a term (likely 12-year limit) TBD at convening general conference	Appointed by bishop, with more congregational candidate input / selection	Currently 2.75% of operating income. Capped at 6.5% of church operating income	Protected 2,400 - 4,500 churches, 240,000 to 400,000 members in US (2024)	Founded in 2022 with disaffiliate churches
Free Methodist	Wesleyan	Yes. Local church holds property for conference; property transferring in is exempt.	Elected to 4-year terms; re-electable	Appointed by Ministerial Appointments Committee chaired by bishop	10-13% of previous year's income	77,000 members in US; 1,050 churches (2015)	Founded in 1860; issues were abolishing slavery and eliminating pew rental
Wesleyan	Wesleyan	Yes. Local church holds property for conference.	One General Superintendent; 4-year term; re-electable	Congregational call system	11% of income	125,000 members; 1,500 churches in US (2019)	Founded in 1843; issue was abolishing slavery
Nazarene	Wesleyan	Yes. Local church holds property for conference.	Six General Superintendents; 4-year term; re-electable	Congregational call system	15% of income; includes pastor's retirement	637,000 members; 5,280 churches in US (2016)	Founded in 1908; issue was focus on holiness
Congregational Methodist	Wesleyan	None	One president; minimal authority	Congregational call system	Decided by local church	15,000 members; 150 churches in US	Founded in 1852; issue was congregational government
Collegiate	Wesleyan	None	Each college has one Dean elected by ordained clergy of same college	Congregational call subject to approval by Dean of the College	None	Three US churches	Founded in 2023; issues include voluntary participation and financial independence