

## HFUMC Discernment Team Metrics and Work

What has the Discernment Team been doing? How did the team help inform our congregation? How did the team collect and track input from our congregation?

### Congregational Communications (Announcements, Mailings to Homes & Church-wide Emails)

Announcements about the discernment process were made at worship services in October.

November letter and a prayer plan were mailed to 1,500+ homes.

December letter, a prayer plan, and a discernment update were mailed to 1,500+ homes.

December information was also emailed using the church-wide email distribution list.

January update was emailed using the church-wide distribution list.

Announcements were made at worship services on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> and Feb 19<sup>th</sup> encouraging members to share their desires for our church using the survey.

Notice was in Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> "This Week @ Huntsville First" encouraging members to look for special discernment email on Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>

A congregational email was sent on February 14<sup>th</sup> encouraging members to share their desires to remain in the denomination or disaffiliate.

### Website Information and Traffic

Information added to our church website about the discernment process included the following:

Team Information and photos to help members identify Discernment Team members

The exact wording of Paragraph 2553

A Letter from our Bishop with North Alabama Conference Discernment Process requirements, supplemental information, and conference FAQs (25 pages)

November letter to the congregation

December letter to the congregation

Glossary and FAQs as of December 19, 2022 (27 pages)

Resource Library of articles and videos emailed by members to the Discernment Team

CLT video from Johnnie Hargrove announcing decision to enter formal discernment

6 informational videos from Pastor Byron Vance about the current situation and process:

As of February 20, 2023, the videos views were as follows:

Video 1- Theologically Progressive vs. Traditional -1,394 views

Video 2 - General Conference - 498 views

Video 3 - Paragraphs from the Book of Discipline - 654 views

Video 4 - A Man, a Plan, a Vote- 414 views

Video 5 - Reviewing options - 636 views

Video 6 - What's Next? - 540 views

Video 7 - Entering Discernment – 3,070 views

## **Prayer Opportunities**

The congregation was invited and encouraged to participate in daily fixed-hour prayer at 3:56 pm based on Proverbs 3:5-6 (or at a convenient time for each member).

The prayer team provided weekly scripture to guide prayer during November and December, with a different focus each week.

Four Chapel prayer times were organized for congregational prayer. Discernment Team members were present and available to answer questions. Attendees at the prayer times were as follows:

November 10 – 5 attendees

November 17 – 8 attendees

December 7 – 5 attendees

December 14 – 2 attendees

January 8 Prayer Room before and after the congregational meeting (hosted by HFUMC Stephen Ministers)

January 17 Prayer Room before and after the congregational meeting (hosted by HFUMC Stephen Ministers)

January 22 Prayer Room before and after the congregational meeting (hosted by HFUMC Stephen Ministers)

## **Congregational Informational Meetings**

Three congregational information meetings were planned and held during January. Two were held on Sunday afternoons. The January 17<sup>th</sup> meeting was held on a Tuesday evening to avoid conflicts arising with the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, which was also the weekend of the youth ski trip. Jennifer Abell and DT volunteers helped Huntsville First members check their membership status at check-in so that any necessary corrections could be made in the event of a church vote. The Discernment Team provided information at each meeting to help educate the congregation about the situation and the process. Pastor Byron Vance spoke at the Jan. 8<sup>th</sup> session. Attendees were encouraged to submit written questions on cards for the Q&A portion of the meeting. Cards were organized by topic, and questions about the current meeting topic were answered immediately if possible. Some required research by the Discernment Team. Some cards were held for the next informational meeting. Questions from the first meeting helped determine some of the information presented at the second meeting, and questions from the second meeting helped determine some of the information presented at the third meeting.

All congregational meetings were live-streamed, and the videos were posted on the HFUMC website for viewing at any time.

The HFUMC Stephen Ministry prepared and offered a staffed prayer room in the Wesley Fellowship Hall with a prayer labyrinth and stations for personal discernment, reflection, and spiritual awareness. The prayer room was open before and after all three congregational meetings.

Date	In-Person Attendance	Video Views
January 8, 2023	150	184
January 17, 2023	120	111
January 22, 2023	85	131
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>426</b>

Using the check-in information, we calculated that approximately 200 members attended at least one of the three congregational meetings in person.

**Small Group Discussions beginning in January 2023**

Emails were sent on three separate dates (December, early January, and late January) to small group/Sunday School leaders inviting their groups to participate with the Discernment Team in small group discussions. Small group discussions were also held after each congregational meeting and with our youth group.

Date	Class/Group Name	Discernment Team Representatives
Jan 6	Sages Luncheon	Sarah Lauren and Billy
Jan 8	Faith Class	Sarah Lauren, Allison, Janice
Jan 8	Upper Room Class	Billy and Bo
Jan 8	4 break-out groups after Information Session 1	2 – 3 DT members in each group
Jan 15	Mustard Seed Class	Billy and Bo
Jan 17	4 break-out groups after Information Session 2	2 – 3 DT members in each group
Jan 22	Joy Seekers Class	Allison and Elizabeth
Jan 22	4 break-out groups after Information Session 3	2 – 3 DT members in each group
Jan 29	Pathfinders Class	Robert, Elizabeth, and Janice
Jan 29	Martha Dotzheimer Class	Billy and Bo
Jan 29	Youth presentation and small groups	James, Allison, Sarah Lauren, Billy, and Bo
Feb 5	Homebuilders Class	Sarah Lauren and Robert
Feb 5	Young Couples Class	James and Elizabeth
Feb 5	Gale Fuller Small Group	Bo, Billy, and Carolyn
Feb 12	Faith Class – Second visit	Bo and Robert
Feb 26	Parenting Class	Billy, Elizabeth, James, & Janice

### Communications with Members at College and Young Adults (18-30 age range)

At the DT's request, the church office shared a list of 433 members ages 18-30. 2 volunteers and 11 DT members contacted all the young members or their parents for whom we had contact information. From that list, emails were sent to 341 young adults/collegians. The email explained the issues before our church and the options. A link to a separate survey with the same questions was provided for these members to submit their thoughts and questions and have the same opportunity to voice their opinion as other members.

### Communications with Youth in addition to the presentation at Sunday night Youth Group on January 29, 2023.

264 emails were sent directly to youth and 76 to youth parents with information and encouragement to participate in the survey. The church and DT still lack contact information for 85 youth members. A DT member sent that list to a few people with children in multiple age groups to see if they have info for any of them. The email to parents (many who have also been called or texted) generated a few more addresses, but due to lack of direct contact information, the team asked parents to forward the message to their children.

Jennifer Abell in the church office also sent youth emails using Shelby to 204 members with information and the survey link. As of Wednesday, Feb 15, she reported the following:

- Both mass emails were successfully sent to 204 people. (*Mostly parent email addresses.*)
- 142 opened the first email (original email message with link to survey)
- 159 opened the second email (follow-up message after receiving mainly parental survey responses. We asked that they forward the survey to their children, for whom the survey was intended, but that all were welcome to submit answers)

With 544 emails sent to youth and youth parents, only 14 surveys were submitted, many from parents.

### Verification of communication with members living in facilities and shut-ins

There were 25 FUMC members at various Independent/Living residencies when a member of the DT reached out individually to them via email. Only one email bounced back, and it was for a member in memory care. Since the communication, two members of the group have passed away. The DT received one response informing us they were receiving all correspondence from the DT. Another DT member verbally confirmed that some members living at Fleming Farm were receiving discernment information.

## Communication with UMW

A DT member actively involved in UMW leadership introduced the discernment process and issues at the UMW February 6th Board meeting. She also encouraged UMW members to take the survey and share their opinions. When asked if they wanted DT representatives to speak at the circle meetings, the opinion was that the members had received information through other groups, information sessions, and Sages; therefore, Circle meetings with the DT were not necessary.

## Emails to [discernment@huntsvillefirst.org](mailto:discernment@huntsvillefirst.org)

Early in the discernment process, a team email was established and shared with the congregation. Emails to [discernment@huntsvillefirst.org](mailto:discernment@huntsvillefirst.org) were received and read by all Discernment Team members. Emails received were logged into a spreadsheet. The DT recorded each email's sender, date, and content. Emails sharing articles and videos were added to the Resource Library on the church website. A team member acknowledged receipt of each email on behalf of the team.

To date, 195 emails have been received and read by the Discernment Team. Two congregation members sent 103 emails (71 from one member and 32 from another). The emails contained questions, concerns, scripture, and links to articles and videos. Questions from members were utilized in compiling a Glossary and FAQ document for our congregation. Team members read and gleaned information from the articles and videos. 95 links to articles submitted to our team were shared with our congregation using the resource library on the HFUMC website.

## Survey/comment card responses

Paper comment cards were collected from individuals at prayer sessions and other times. Paper cards were also collected from four collection boxes located at the Wesley Worship Center entrance (table between double doors), the Clinton Street foyer, the back of the traditional Sanctuary, and the table by the elevator at the front Sanctuary entrance.

Surveys were also made available electronically. A "Share your Thoughts" link was added to the HFUMC website under Discernment. Additionally, a QR code was created that linked to the survey. The QR codes for the survey were printed on 20+ posters displayed throughout the church, on the paper survey cards, in the @Huntsville First newsletter, and directly emailed to all church email contacts.

Paper and electronically submitted responses were compiled in a Google Forms document for Discernment Team use and consideration. Emails received instead of a survey were also included in the compilation. Care was taken to combine duplicate responses so that only one

response per member was counted in determining our members' desires for the future of our church. The most recent response was counted if a member changed his/her position.

Announcements encouraging members to participate in the survey were made at all 5 worship services on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> and at 11 am services on Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>. An email was sent to all members on February 14<sup>th</sup> encouraging survey participation. The worship announcements and the congregational email contained the following: "One survey question asks, "What do you wish for our church's future?" Please share whether you wish to remain in our denomination or disaffiliate."

As of February 20, 2023, 364 surveys and emails were received from congregation members expressing personal discernment and desires for our church. The desires expressed by our members were compiled and are as follows:

174	Remain United Methodist
16	Wait
65	Disaffiliate
34	Vote
75	Unspecified

The 75 survey responses and emails that did not specify a clear desire were submitted early in the process and asked questions that helped inform the content of the Discernment Glossary and FAQs and the information sessions.

### **Discernment Team Meetings**

9/27	Original organizational meeting
10/16	Team meeting to prepare to meet with District Superintendent (DS)
10/17	Meeting with Tom Parrish, DS, for approval of covenant, timeline and process
10/23	Work session - 2+ hours
10/30	Team work session - 2+ hours
11/6	Team work session - 2+ hours
11/16	Team fellowship and work session
11/20	Team work session - 2+ hours
12/4	Team work session - 2+ hours
12/11	Team work session - 2+ hours
12/19	Team work session - 1+ hours
1/5	Team work session - 1+ hours
1/8	Team meeting after 1st information session
1/11	Team work session - 1+ hours
1/15	Team work session - 2+ hours
1/17	Team meeting after 2nd information session
1/22	Team meeting after 3rd information session
1/26	Team work session - 1+ hours

- 2/2 Team work session - 1+ hours
- 2/5 Team work session - 2+ hours (Steve Smith, CLT chair, visited at beginning)
- 2/9 Team work session - 1+ hours
- 2/12 Team work session- 2+ hours
- 2/19 Team work session and meeting with pastors - 1 hour
- 2/22 Team work session – 3 hours

In addition, smaller teams have met and worked to develop prayer plans, youth plans, communications plans, congregational session plans, and plans for shut-ins to participate. Many hours have been devoted to research, reaching out, and talking with members from other churches, including interviews with discernment teams from other churches and pastors from other areas. The team also read the letters sent to the CLT by members of our congregation before voting to enter discernment.