



**SAINT MARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

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# St. Mark Messenger

By Grace Transformed...

I have attended a lot of churches in my life. My family attended an interdenominational church when we lived in Japan and we attended a Baptist church when we lived in Norway. I was a Southern Baptist for 20 years. For a while in Houston, I tried going to an Evangelical Presbyterian church where they were five-point Calvinists.

I was born, however, into a Methodist family and I was baptized and confirmed at Methodist churches. It was those formative years in the Methodist Church that guided me through my journey of faith and kept me on a more moderate path. The United Methodist Church taught me that God is approachable, loving, and full of grace and mercy and wants everyone to be saved. I was introduced to Jesus in the United Methodist Church. I also learned about John and Charles Wesley and how the movement they began had changed the world.

I loved the story of the Wesleys and even when I was a member of another denomination, I identified at some level as a Methodist. Every time I would go to a different church, I would look in the index of the hymnal to see how many Charles Wesley hymns were in it. And when I went to seminary at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, I particularly interested when we discussed the Wesleys and the Methodist movement in Church History. When I attended Drew University Theological School, a United Methodist Seminary, I felt God calling me back to the United Methodist Church. It was when I decided to move back to Texas after five years on the east coast, that I decided to answer that call and return home to the United Methodist Church.

One thing I liked about the United Methodist Church was its slogan, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." While that is largely aspirational, the welcoming aspect of open doors is how I believe God is. God welcomes everyone. There are no exceptions. The church I want to be a part of is welcoming, and gracious. That is one of the reasons I love St. Mark. It is one of the most welcoming congregations I have ever known.

But the United Methodist Church has had many struggles over the last few years. The primary issue has been homosexuality, but other issues, some financial, some theological, and some political, have caused the church to splinter. On May 1, a new Methodist denomination called the Global Methodist Church is being formed. There are churches in our conference already making plans to disaffiliate with the UMC so they can join the GMC. One such church is Newcastle First UMC where I used to serve. Acton UMC is leaving to join the Free Methodist Church, a denomination that split off of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1860.

While the Global Methodist Church is launching May 1, churches in our conference will not have the opportunity to leave the UMC until later in the year. Churches that want to disaffiliate this year must inform the District Superintendent by June 1 and a special Annual Conference will be held in September to deal with disaffiliations. I am not sure when the disaffiliation will take effect after that conference.

I want to stress that there is no urgency. The Global Methodist Church has not finalized their book of discipline and there are many unanswered questions about how that church will be structured. The United Methodist Church has not changed its stance on homosexuality or any other issue and will not have the opportunity to do so until 2024. If Saint Mark does want to discuss disaffiliation, I advise that we learn more about the Global Methodist Church and/or other options and not rush into any decisions.

One thing I do know is that it costs money to disaffiliate. Two years of apportionments must be paid, and St. Mark's share of the unpaid pension liability must be paid. The cost would be significant. I don't know if that can be paid out over time or not. Disaffiliation would also require changing signage (the Cross and Flame would have to be removed) and changing the legal name of the church, which could prove costly.

*continued*

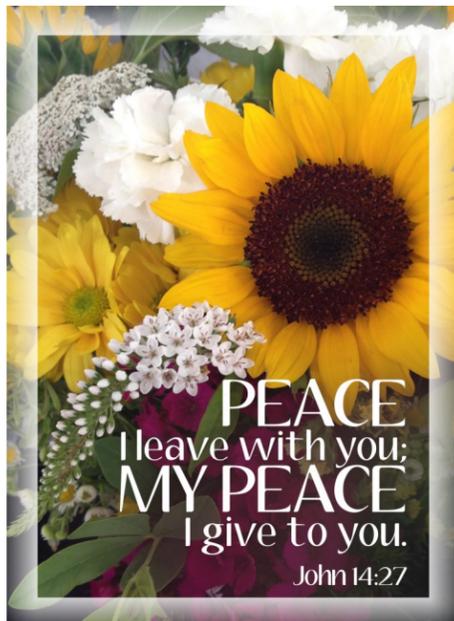
*.....reaching upward to God and outward to God's people*



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Church

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