



Faith United Methodist Church  
Lighthouse Congregation Frequently Asked Questions

Faith has been selected by our Annual Conference to serve as a Lighthouse Congregation. This “Frequently Asked Questions” document (or “FAQ”) is designed to explain what that means to our church—and why it is needed.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

**What is happening in the United Methodist Church that is creating the need for Lighthouse Congregations?**

For many years, the worldwide United Methodist Church has been struggling with controversial issues involving human sexuality, and whether LGBTQ persons could be ordained as ministers in the denominations, and UMC pastors could perform weddings of couples of persons of the same sex. The issue continues to be very challenging, with a majority of United Methodists in the United States supporting a more inclusive approach to human sexuality, while a majority of United Methodists worldwide—and a sizable minority in the United States—support a more exclusive approach. The issue will again be tackled by the denomination’s General Conference in 2024, and the hope is that a solution can be found that will allow for regional

churches with different interpretations to remain in communion.

In the meantime, a group of churches has decided to form a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church, and some are choosing to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church to join the new denomination, join other denominations, or become independent. This disaffiliation process is challenging, because it requires churches to make exit payments if they wish to leave with church assets, which are held in trust for the United Methodist Church. Nevertheless, a number of churches, including churches in our area, are choosing to take this step.

A vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church can be very painful for members of a congregation and creates a difficult dilemma for those who do not want to leave the denomination. The leaders of our Conference have recognized this painful dilemma, and the Lighthouse Congregation is one means to help address it.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FAITH UMC TO BE A LIGHTHOUSE CONGREGATION?

### What is a Lighthouse Congregation?

Lighthouse Congregations are local churches that are equipped to welcome anyone whose church has closed or disaffiliated. Their mission is to provide care, a place to belong, and tangible ways to explore the next steps for those on this difficult journey. These United Methodist faith communities are a resting place providing a haven of peace and grace. The initiative is based on Matthew 5:16 – “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

### What is the essence of a Lighthouse Congregation?

A Lighthouse Congregation is asked to provide spiritual care to those who are hurting because of disaffiliation of a congregation. For many of these persons, spiritual trust has been broken. It is about grief and

**What is Faith asked to do as a Lighthouse Congregation?**

trauma care. Spiritual hurt can be traumatic. Designation as a Lighthouse Congregation, however, is NOT a church growth strategy or a way to increase attendance or volunteer numbers. It is about aiding those who want to remain United Methodists and need time to grieve, heal, and seek assistance reentering the life of the United Methodist Church wherever they so choose.

Faith will provide a welcoming place to belong during this time of grief and transition, for as long as needed, including a place with caring relationships, listening hearts, and unconditional love. We will also provide ministry opportunities in which to engage, if the new people are interested. There should be no pressure. We will also provide a place to worship, online or in person, including receiving the sacraments of communion and baptism, a place to learn and grow through small group gatherings, Bible studies, and prayer opportunities, and a place to serve through hands-on ministries that involve making a difference and sharing the love of God with others.

More specific measures will include the organization of local *Beginning Again* groups. *Beginning Again* is a written guide to aid individuals who wish to remain in the United Methodist Church. The guide is produced by the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences. We will also provide a connection between persons or groups with Conference and District resources to help them discern their next steps as they consider a new church home.

**What can we as individual members of Faith do to help?**

First, we can pray for those who have been displaced by a Church closure or disaffiliation. We can meet individuals where they are physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. We can listen and simply be with them, assessing their needs through the lens of grief. Remember that it is all about what we can do for them, not what they can do for us.

**How will we identify Faith as a Lighthouse Congregation?**

We may have to be proactive with them; they may not be comfortable asking for help just yet, but don't push, don't rush, this process will take time. We can build trust by offering consistency and persistence. Stay connected with them even when referring them to other resources. Help them feel heard with no judgement. Give them a safe environment. In other words, love them.

The District and Conference will prepare a list of Lighthouse Congregations to be distributed to those expressing interest in remaining in the United Methodist Church after a congregation disaffiliates. Faith will also state its participation in the program in our publications, and on our website.

**WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN TO ME IF I AM A MEMBER OF A DISAFFILIATING CONGREGATION, AND I WISH TO REMAIN A UNITED METHODIST?**

**How can I maintain my United Methodist Church Membership?**

A person whose church has closed or disaffiliated and who wishes to remain a United Methodist will be able to take steps to maintain United Methodist Church membership. Three options exist: 1) transfer membership (temporarily or permanently) to a local congregation that is remaining in the United Methodist Church, 2) transfer membership temporarily to a Lighthouse Congregation, or 3) transfer membership temporarily to an Annual Conference. Regardless of your preference, Faith will assist you with the process of maintaining your membership.

**Will Faith remain United Methodist, or could it disaffiliate also?**

As part of the process to become a Lighthouse Congregation, Faith United Methodist Church was required to commit to remaining a part of the United Methodist Church, and to serve those who have lost their church homes through disaffiliation or closure. Furthermore, on the issue of the church and human sexuality, in 2021, Faith, in a church-wide vote, affirmed the following statement,

as do all Reconciling Ministries Congregations, “We celebrate God’s gift of diversity and value the wholeness made possible in community equally shared and shepherded by all. We welcome and affirm people of every gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, who are also of every age, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, level of education, and family structure, and of every economic, immigration, marital, and social status, and so much more. We acknowledge that we live in a world of profound social, economic, and political inequities. As followers of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the pursuit of justice and pledge to stand in solidarity with all who are marginalized and oppressed.” In addition, Faith chose to become a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network, a group of independent organizations committed to “intersectional justice across and beyond the United Methodist connection, working for the full participation of all LGBTQ+ people throughout the life and leadership of the Church.”

Faith United Methodist Church’s daily focus is captured in the following statement, “JESUS said, ‘go and make disciples of all nations ... and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’ Faith UMC is a place where people belong in community, become followers of Jesus and believe the good news of the gospel.”

**If I attend Faith Church under the Lighthouse initiative, will I be pressured to join or to volunteer?**

No. The Lighthouse Congregation is here to welcome and support you, and to assist you in a time of discernment. Of course, you will be welcome to participate in worship, study groups, and other activities as you choose.

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THESE MATTERS?

For more information about attending Faith and its role as a Lighthouse Congregation, you can contact Faith United Methodist Church's staff by calling 301-881-1881 or by e-mailing [office@faithworkshere.org](mailto:office@faithworkshere.org). For questions about the issues affecting the United Methodist denomination as a whole, including positions on human sexuality and disaffiliation, you can contact Faith's Lay Member of Annual Conference, Hunter Prillaman, at [hprill@aol.com](mailto:hprill@aol.com).