

2023 A Year of Discernment

By Pastor Abi Foerster

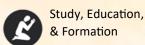
As this year wraps up and we find ourselves celebrating the joy of the Christmas season, the leadership of your church has already begun looking to the New Year. For St. Thomas and many United Methodist Churches across the United States, 2023 will be a year of discernment around the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusion as the denomination as a whole prepares for the next General Conference, which will be held April 23 – May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, NC.

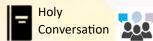
Some of you may be asking, "Why is this discernment process important?" It is important because St. Thomas is a church body of 850 members who hold a variety of theological perspectives and lived experiences. We believe all members of the congregation will benefit from engaging on this topic collectively, from those who are crystal clear on their understanding of the topic to those who are beginning their discernment journey and those in-between.

Our denomination itself has wrestled with this topic for nearly fifty years and for some, a tipping point has been reached. A new denomination called the Global Methodist Church (GMC) launched in May 2022. Some local churches have already disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church to join the GMC; others have discerned that they will remain United Methodist, and still others are becoming independent or joining yet another denomination altogether. As you can imagine, there are many implications for us to discuss.

As your pastor, I would ask that you engage this process and the framework that the leadership team has adopted. In order to be faithful to hearing God's will for our church, we **need everyone to participate.** Our values of being biblically grounded, relational, mission-minded, faithful, and joyful will guide our work together. We are also committed to the following three components within the discernment process:

Prayer







Our hope is that each of us will grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and our faith will be stronger, regardless of the outcome of the discernment process.

In the coming weeks, you will hear more about our plans from our leaders. For now, please plan to join us for the upcoming sermon series, "Rise Up!" to kick off this process.

Between services on January 15, Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert will also share about the disaffiliation process with the congregation. We will gather in Fellowship Hall and she will share the same presentation that she shared with the Church Council in September. She will also be available to answer any questions that may arise.

Cont'd from page 1

Gathering for Video Watch Parties

We plan to host a series of video watch parties on Sunday afternoons at St. Thomas from Jan. 22 – Feb. 26, from 3:00-5:00 pm. At these watch parties, we will show two videos so that we can hear from two pastors who are well known in our denomination. One will articulate reasons for leaving the United Methodist Church and the other for staying in the United Methodist Church.

The first pastor is the **Rev. Rob Renfroe**, who is pastor of discipleship at The Woodlands Methodist Church in Houston, TX, the president of the national organization Good News, and the author of numerous Bible studies. He has chosen to leave the UMC. The second pastor is the **Rev. Adam Hamilton**, who is the senior pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS, one of the largest, most highly visible churches in the country. He is also the author of numerous books and bible studies and is committed to remaining United Methodist.

Here are the first three dates we will gather and the topics we will discuss together in holy conversations; I encourage you to mark them on your calendar now:

- Jan. 22, 2023 | "The UMC is Dividing" & "Why UMC?"
- Jan. 29, 2023 | "Our Differences Regarding the Bible" & "Love of Scripture"
- Feb. 5, 2023 | "Our Differences Regarding Jesus" & "Committed to Christ"

To participate, individuals <u>MUST RSVP</u> on their Connect Card in worship or sign up on our website so that small conversational groups may be formed prior to each gathering. Through the watch parties, we will discern how God is leading St. Thomas. We may also offer a variety of other gatherings as needed after the watch parties such as bible study, fellowship events, town hall meetings, etc. Please stay tuned in our newsletter, website, and during announcements in worship. Our goal is to keep communication lines open and to listen well to one another.

To that end, there is now a mechanism on our website to email all members of the Church Council to help facilitate even better communication. Please go to this page:

https://www.stthomasumc.org/ourleaders, and scroll down to find a large, orange button that says "Click Here to Email All Council Leaders." Hunter Lenz or Barry Barnard (the

Chair and Vice Chair of Church Council in 2023) will respond to your email and follow up as needed.

Our goal for this discernment process together is to accomplish the following:

- Prayer
- Foundation Building
- Bible Study
- Exploring our Tradition and Theological Heritage
- Listen, Love & Open Dialogue
- Receive Feedback
- Draw Conclusions

I hope that you will be a vital part of this conversation and help us draw the best conclusion so that we can accomplish our mission to "reach, nourish, and serve the community so all may experience healing and new life through Christ."



Sometimes God's grace surprises us in ways we could not have imagined. We are called to actively respond – to rise up and engage! Then, we are called to live in gratitude and celebration, to be witnesses to the world of what God has done in our lives. Join us in the New Year as we begin the discernment process and are asked to rise up, and jump into the future together.

- Jan. 1 New Year's Day Breakfast, 8:45 9:45 am with ONE service at 10 am. Paula Renfro, 2023 Head Lay Leader, will encourage us to "Rise Up" and we will experience a Wesleyan Covenant Service.
- Jan. 8 "Rise Up and Discern Your Call" with Pastor Abi
- Jan. 15 "Rise Up, Jump into the Future" with Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, Northern Virginia District Superintendent

December Highlights





Northern Virginia District Training Day Saturday, January 14, 2023





KATE BOWLER

Author of Everything Happens for a Reason & No Cure for Being Human



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Author of Canoeing the Mountains & Tempered Resilience

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learn more:

2023.novatrainingday.com

Staffing News

By Janie Russell

Our Organist, **Jacque Watkins**, after a long and illustrious career in music for more than 65 years retired at the end of 2022. As you may know, this is <u>Jacque's second retirement</u> as she worked for the Manassas City Schools as a music educator and retired in 2008 from her post there! This second retirement was effective as of December 31, 2022. Jacque is looking forward to focusing on her health, family, and travel in this next chapter.



We are very appreciative of all that Jacque has done over the past ten years to support our wonderful music ministry! We wish her all the best in her new endeavors. Jacque will return in the New Year on **Sunday, January 8, 2023** so that we can celebrate this milestone appropriately with her and her husband, Ed. If you would like to contribute to Jacque's retirement gift, please note "Jacque" in the memo line of your check or in the notes section online. SPRC will begin searching for a new accompanist in January and thank you for your patience during this transition.

Other Updates

As you are probably aware, following the pandemic our weekly worship attendance has not recovered completely. Unfortunately, parishioners have not only been slow to return to church, but their commitment to financial giving has followed a similar pattern. Due to this current reality, the Staff Parish Relations Committee has been faced with making budget cuts that can only be described as painful. We are trying to be as fair as possible, with each area of ministry facing some decrease in staff positions or hours. Here are the positions that will be impacted beginning in 2023:

- Media Technician (eliminated position)
- Nursery Workers (reduced hours by 50%)
- Food Pantry Support Staff (eliminated 3 positions)
- Contracted Marketing (reduced services by 60% beginning April 1, 2023)
- Move from two appointed pastors to one appointed pastor beginning July 1, 2023

We ask for your continued prayers and commitment to financial stewardship so that we can accomplish our mission together. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.



By Kristi Swanson



The Children's Ministry had a busy December with Advent, the Christmas Pageant, caroling, and most attending families Front Porch the Ministry's Breakfast

with Santa. Christmas is always the most wonderful time of the year, but being together this year meant even more.



For January, Sunday School will continue with Grow Curriculum's Big and Small series. Do you ever stop and think about how big God must be? God created this whole world, all of the planets, and stars in the sky . . . God is really big! Knowing God is big can

make us feel small and inconsequential. But the truth is, even the small things are a big deal to God. The story of Job will help everyone realize that even though we are small, God listens to our big feelings, God sees the big picture, God cares about every small problem, and we can also be a big help in small ways.

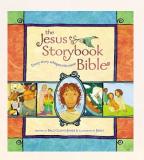
We have resumed collecting offering at Sunday School and Children's Church as we did prior to the pandemic. Our goal is to teach children about faithful giving and stewardship. Please encourage them to consider giving part of any earnings or gifts they receive and feel free to send them with loose change. We will do games and challenges throughout the year to make giving fun! If you have any questions, please reach out to Ms. Kristi.

Children's Church will continue in the 11:00 hour with the first part of the program dedicated to singing with Mr. Dominick. The rest of the time is spent reinforcing the lessons and ideas from our Sunday School curriculum and children's messages with multidisciplinary activities.



The Tweens program will participate in a game night on January 13th from 6:30-8:00 pm, with activities including an online game that earns food for people in need. For this year, we have

resumed a parent sign-up for dinners. If you have a tween joining us, we can't wait to sample your culinary (or take-out) expertise once or twice this year!



We have a special program beginning this year for the pre-schoolers of our church! On January 29, three and four year olds are invited to join us at either service to be presented with a preschool devotional. This is the first step to preparing your little one for 3rd grade when they enter the

Tweens program, learn to read the Bible in Camp Tweens and receive their very own Bible. This year only, children who are currently in kindergarten may also join since the opportunity was not yet available last winter. They still have plenty of time to prepare! If children of other ages are interested in devotional materials, please see Ms. Kristi.

Please also save the date for February 19 from 12-1pm when the Children's Council will host an event in the Fellowship Hall, "We Love Our Volunteers!" If you have assisted the ministry at all in the last year, or even in the past, we invite you to join us for light refreshments, and testimony from kids and volunteers who appreciate your participation. We will also share opportunities for volunteering in 2023.

In early preparation for the Easter Egg Hunt we are also collecting 18 egg containers. You can leave them in the food pantry bin and Teresa will funnel them to the children's ministry.

The Children's Ministry is looking forward to a great new year, getting to know Jesus a little better with kids and their families.





By Pastor Arum Kim

The PACK students had a well-deserved winter break from the school and enjoyed the Christmas special worship and family gatherings. Well done at the Fall semester and go for the Spring semester! The PACK AM & PACK Night will resume on January 8th.

Confirmation Class will start soon in February. So far, 6 students have committed to join this year's Confirmation journey. If your child or grandchild is over 6th grade and interested in "confirming" their faith in God (either through baptism or confirmation), please let me know!

- Jan. 1 (1st Sun): NO PACK AM & PACK Night in observance of New Year's Day.
- Jan. 8 (2nd Sun): PACK AM & PACK Night Fun with Ice Skating
- Jan. 15 (3rd Sun): DS Presentation instead of PACK AM & PACK Night Small Groups
- Jan. 22 (4th Sun): PACK AM & PACK Night Mission (Project TBD)
- Jan. 29 (5th Sun): PACK AM, but NO PACK Night on the 5th Sunday of the month
- January 31 (Tue): Confirmation Mentor Training

There are two important events in February, so please mark these on your calendar now!

- Feb. 17–19 (Fri-Sun): Youth Ministry Cohort Ski Retreat
- Feb. 26 (Sun): Confirmation Class begins. More details will be emailed to the confirmation class students and their parents/caregivers.

December was full of events that made the season special. The PACK also had a Christmas Party! It was fun with sharing of our Christmas family tradition, Christmas Bingo, a couple of



games (especially the Mouthwash Karaoke – gargle the Carols), and a gift exchange. The PACK also helped with the Drive-Thru Living Nativity and the Breakfast with Santa events. Please check out their photos on a separate page of this newsletter. Our church is so thankful for our students. Their love for our church and our community are so big!

If you have any questions or would like to know how to support the Student Ministry, please feel free to contact me by sending an email to, arum.kim@stthomasumc.org, by calling, 571-438-3953 (cell). We especially need a person or a group of adults to offer dinner at PACK Night.



Photos from the PACK Christmas Party







By Veronica McGuin

The month of January will kick off registration for the 2023-2024 Preschool school year. Registration will begin January 3rd for currently enrolled families. January 9th we will accept registration for church members and January 13th registration will be open to the public. Registration for the Day Care is accepted throughout the year as long as there is availability. The 2023-2024 school year is sure not be another safe, fun and exciting year for you and your child/children. Registration forms are available on our website or you may pick up any forms in the Sunbeam office and take a tour of our amazing school. The month of January will also be parent teacher conferences for the 3 and 4 year-old classes.

Sunbeam collected 38 Advent bags to help support the St. Thomas Food Pantry. It's one of the mission projects our families and Sunbeam supports each year. We continue to collect plastic to help St. Thomas reach their goal of 500 pounds of plastic to received a bench and at the same time help preserve our planet for the future of our children.

Our "Wishing Tree", is located at the front entrance of the school. If you or anyone you know would like spread some Christmas joy this season you can stop by, pick a wish and we will be sure to get it to that special Sunbeam person for you. Please be sure to stop and take a moment to look at the decorations the children have made for the "Jesse Tree," located by the kitchen area of the school.



SCC staff at their annual Christmas Party

A big thank you to Ron Campbell for always being available to fix what is broke at the school, research the best options for upgrades and addressing the needs of Sunbeam during his term as head trustee. As the children would say, "Hi Mr. Fixer". So, Thank You! Mr. Fixer.

UWF (United Women in Faith) Christmas Party



This year, 28 ladies gathered for the Annual Christmas Party — a potluck gathering and gift exchange. Lots of laughter and Christmas joy was felt by all.

One highlight this year was that the United Women of Faith honored Martha Barlow with a Special Mission Recognition Pin for her outstanding leadership of the Dorcas Circle. Thank you, Martha, for stepping out of your comfort zone to keep the Dorcas Circle going, keeping all the ladies informed, involved and engaged in their circle.





Happy New Year! We are looking forward to resuming our Tuesday Night Dinners. Thank you for signing up online or calling the church office by noon on Mondays. If the weather is looking like snow please check the church website to check on the dinner status.

Christmas Day Dinner #22 is now in the books. We served a total of 2,010 meals, which includes delivering 593 First Responder meals to 28 different locations. In addition, we made 281 dessert boxes for the hospital. It was a busy week but under the guidance of our master chef, Frank Priest, everything came together. We were blessed to have Frank's brother Bill with us again to assist in the kitchen. Connie Santee is a master at organizing the first responder meals for deliveries. Our food pantry donated their refrigerator truck to us for storing all of our food. This enables us to do so many meals. We would like to give a special thank you to Jeremy Smith, the owner of Chick-fil-A on Sudley Manor Drive, for his generous donation of Chick-fil-A brownies. We also extend our deepest gratitude to all of you who helped in some waydonating supplies, money, or time. We couldn't do this without your help. You helped us bless so many on Christmas Day again this year—thank you!



January Menus

January 3 **Soup Variety Philly Chicken Cheesesteak French Fries**

Dessert: Hot Fudge Pudding Cake Kids: Grilled Cheese

January 10 Salisbury Steak/Gravy **Mashed Potato Dinner Roll Corn Souffle**

Dessert: Angel Cake w/Strawberries

Kids: Ravioli

Cookies of the Month: Butter Toffee

January 17 **Chicken Pot Pie Twice Baked Potato Dessert: Raspberry Bars Kids: Chicken Nuggets**

January 24 **Soup Variety BLT Hoagie Zucchini Sticks Dessert: Apple Cake**

Kids: Bologna & Cheese Sandwich

January 31

Caprese Salad w/Balsamic **Spaghetti & Meatballs Bubble Bread Dessert: Rice Pudding**

Kids: Same as Adults

To signup for dinner please visit our website or call the church office by noon on Mondays. Dine-in service is from 5-5:45 pm and curbside pickup is from 5:30—6:00 pm.

Cost is \$7 per person, (\$25 for a family of 4, \$5 per each additional family member above 4). Kids meals are \$4 per person. Kids entrees as adult meals are \$7 per person. Cookies of the month, available on the 2nd Tuesday, are \$10 per dozen.

Youth Center Renovation Update

By Dave Rea

The contractor team has made major strides in recent weeks on the Youth Center renovation. Major accomplishments include the new entrance sidewalk, patio and stairways to the existing mid-level door. After about a week of cure time for the concrete, the masonry contractor will cut the opening for the new doorway. In the basement, the new boiler has been installed. This boiler and tank will provide both heat and hot water for the building. The new system is very energy efficient and is less than half the size of the old boiler and water heater combination. Next up is more interior work in the basement and the new entrance foyer.

To support our renovation efforts, please note Youth Center in your memo line, or on our website, check Youth Center renovations. Thank you!





Mission Council News

By Cathy Campbell

Many, many thanks from the Mission Council to all who participated in our three Christmas missions. We were able to send gifts to 31 children from Prince William County and Manassas City school systems. Manassas Health and Rehab were very appreciative of the 117 gifts sent to their permanent residents. Our Angel Shop was bursting at the seams with toys this year. We were able to provide two gifts to every child, a box of sidewalk chalk and a stuffed animal. The Angel Shop served 58 families with 168 children. I believe we provided a Merry Christmas to everyone. Thank you so much for spreading the love of God!





Photos of the Angel Shop

United Women in Faith News & Events



Claim Your Joy: Women's Conference

January 28, 2023 | 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Floris United Methodist Church

Often women feel as though they serve as cruise ship directors - facilitating fun and enjoyment for all those around them, yet forgetting to take time for their own joy. Come spend a day away from responsibilities (with childcare!) as we dig deeper into this concept of joy. We'll discuss how to find it, why it's sometimes

hard to access, and maybe even have a little FUN alongside other women in the community. Our presenter line-up includes four faithful female leaders that will share stories and insights from their unique perspective. Speakers include: Pam Bentley, Megan Rae Dietrick, Kelly Ivey Johnson, and Rev. Isaiah Park. Attendees will walk away rejuvenated and equipped to rid themselves of the guilt and martyrdom that holds them back from claiming the life of joy they were designed for.

Find the Claim Your Joy signup on the Floris UMC website: https://www.florisumc.org/connect/adults/ Cost is \$45 including lunch. We are planning to carpool to Floris UMC so once you register, let Pat Dodson know at andyandpatd@yahoo.com

Childcare is available for children aged 3 months-11 years. Space is limited. Please use the link provided on the confirmation page or email to register children at least 48 hours before the event.

Other Upcoming Events:

- Dorcas Circle Tuesday, January 10 at 1pm, Room 300. Join us each month for study and fellowship.
- Save the Date: February Potluck Brunch Saturday, February 11 at 9:30, Room 300. Stay tuned for more details!



By Marian Ludlow & Lynn Furlong



On Friday December 16, 4 OWLS went to the Manassas Art Factory to see the train show. This was a change from what was scheduled. We had planned to go see the lights at Bull Run but opted to stay local. Frank Hale, who has been a train "conductor" forever, was displaying his trains there. It was fun seeing Frank, and some of his family, as we enjoyed the different trains chug chugging along.

After leaving the Art Factory, we walked across the street and had dinner at Mariachi's. We may have been small in number, but we laughed, had lots of fun, laughed, enjoyed our dinner, and, oh yes, laughed. As usual, our OWLS outing full of fun, food, and fellowship.

Our next outing will be January 27 when we will meet at Bella Vita Italian Restaurant at 9675 Liberia Ave, Manassas. Bella Vita is a favorite so we hope to see everyone there. We



will meet at 1:00PM. Please RSVP to Marian Ludlow (571 -315-6881) or Lynn Furlong (703-499-0243) by January 24 so we can give a count to Bella Vita on January 25. We hope to see everyone there!

New Hospitality Statement Adopted

Our core value of **being relational** pushes us to realize that while hospitality happens inside a church, it does not begin at the church's front door. Instead, it starts in the hearts of our members wherever they are reaching new people for Christ and sharing God's love with the world.

We believe all persons are created in the image of God and have sacred worth. Therefore, we will treat one another with justice, kindness, dignity, and respect.

We welcome everyone without exception.

We believe God extends mercy and grace to all, gifting and loving us for ministry. As his beloved children, God calls us to extend this same mercy and grace to others.

While we hold a variety of perspectives on faith, theology, and biblical interpretation, we are committed to being a church where it is safe to disagree, express doubt, and share sincere convictions. We covenant to respect, love and serve one another along our faith journeys.

We are committed to providing a spirit of welcome to every person who attends and wants to participate in our worship services, small groups, classes, and ministries.

This statement was adopted unanimously by the Church Council on November 22, 2022.

Welcoming Others

As one of the members of the LGBTQ+ work stream group, I wanted to share that part of the welcoming statement that the Church Council adopted in November is:

"We welcome everyone without exception."

As a high school counselor, I have heard those who identify as LGBTQ+ feel excluded from participation in a variety of activities and organizations. I feel that it is important to advocate for all who feel excluded - and to explicitly state support to welcome them to STUMC. This group in particular is vulnerable. Jesus welcomed everyone without exception. As one of your Lay Delegates, I pray for discernment, and to advocate that we welcome the "unseen" who are not currently participating in our ministries.

At this time, the Council did not adopt any of the final recommendations that were offered by the LGBTQ work stream group for where we should go as a church at this stage. While there were tangible actions that required various time and financial commitments, the Council felt we needed to create and move through a framework for starting discussions around this important issue.

You will see the plan for the rollout of having these discussions as a congregation on page one, and the new hospitality statement (to the right).

I hope to see each of you participate so that we can become an even more welcoming community of faith.

Yours in Christ, Holly Banner



A Prayer for 2023 and the Work of Discernment

The following prayer was written by our Lay Leaders as a foundation to the work of discernment that is outlined on page one of this Newsletter. Paula Renfro, Bill Coppa, and Perry Bailey invite you to offer this prayer up to God individually and within your ministry teams until the work is completed.

God of grace, we come before You in contrition and repentance. As we recognize the splendor of Your holiness, we are unmade before You because we are sinful and broken creatures who desperately need a Savior. Touch our lips with the flaming coal of your glory so that our iniquity will be taken away and our brokenness healed. Set us apart for your work and guide us in your sanctifying grace.

God of wisdom, we seek your counsel in this time of discernment. The way before us is not clear because we see with the eyes of finite, fallen creatures. Grant to us Your vision and understanding that we may see the way You

would have us walk, and guard our steps so that we would not stray from Your path.

God of compassion, lead us as we seek to understand what it means to love all those around us as we love ourselves, without exception. Open our hearts and minds that we will hear and learn from the tradition of our forbearers in the faith, from our own experience of living in a broken world, from our yielded and Spirit-led reason as we dialog with each other, and most importantly from the council of Your sacred and inspired Word.

God of all things, we enter into this time of seeking with both humility and boldness, secure in knowing that You will lead us to discover Your plan for our church as we seek You in a spirit of surrender and submission. This we covenant to do in the great name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.



Upcoming Events

Jan 1	One Worship Service	10 AM
lan 2	Church Office & Sunha	am Chil

Jan 2 Church Office & Sunbeam Children's Center Closed

Jan 3 Tuesday Night Dinner Resumes

SCC Registration Opens for Currently Enrolled Families

Jan 8 Jacque Watkins Retirement Party | 10 AM

Jan 9 SCC Registration Opens for Church Families

Jan 13 SCC Registrations Opens to the Public

Jan 14 Northern Virginia District Training Day

Jan 15 Rev. Sarah Calvert (NOVA District Superintendent)
 Presentation on the Process of Disaffiliation | 10 AM

Jan 16 Church Office Closed in Observance of MLK Jr. Day

• Jan 22 First Watch Party | 3—5 PM

Jan 27 OWLS Outing

• Jan 28 "Claim Your Joy" Women's Conference | 9 AM—2:30 PM

Jan 29 Preschool Devotional Kit Milestone, During Worship

8899 Sudley Road, Manassas, VA 20110

Rev. Abi Foerster, Senior Pastor

Rev. Arum Kim, Associate Pastor

stthomasumc.org

703-368-5161

Newsletter Deadline:

15th of the month

Please email all articles to both:

samantha.bouquet@stthomasumc.org

receptionist@stthomasumc.org

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Januai	ry Birthdays					
1		2 Gary Gallahan Ron Weber	3	4 Chloe Izzo	5 Arum Kim	6	7 Joan Doggett Jamison Weed
8	David Ometz	9	10	Wyn Weber Mitchell Sutton	Al Dawson Riley Miller	13	14
15	Sue Booher Holly Banner Susan Must	16	17	18	19	20 Zachary Brockwell	21 Dwayne Young
22	Sarah Jarrett Lydia Schnack	23	John Guice	25 MaKayla Wright	26 Samuel Jarrett	Marian Ludlow Janie Russell	28
29 Mat	Doreen Enchill thew Hammack	30 John Duffy	31 Kristi Swanson				