

Let's Talk! ...conversations about becoming a faith community.

Frequently Asked Questions

Following the announcement that Pastor Alex was being reappointed in July and Pastor Ethan would remain as pastor for Mt. Comfort UMC and MTC both congregations were invited to sign up for conversations about becoming a faith community. During the week of February 24th four conversations were held; in all about 50 people participated.

It's important to note that although we have some ideas as to how we will function as one faith community the Cooperative Ministry Executive Team (made up of leaders from both congregations) will be tasked with figuring out the logistics. For the sake of transparency, the following represents some of the most frequently asked questions and the answers as we currently know them...

Why does “becoming a faith community” sound more and more like a merger?

- Because that's exactly what it has become... We know there are those that feel we've been deceiving the congregations by saying over and over “this is not a merger”, but the truth is we were communicating what we knew and were told at the time. Several things (Alex's medical leave, finances, cooperative ministry, etc.) have made us realize that becoming one church is the best option for both congregations moving forward. This was not the original intention, but as our ministry partnership has progressed merging became inevitable. For some it's a cause for fear and concern, but for others it's a cause for excitement and hope... even answered prayers. Whatever your feelings may be about where we are now, we ask for your continued prayers and patience as we see what God has in store for us all.

What will the merged church be called?

- We realize that both congregations have a strong connection to their respective names; each reflects an important legacy and story. However, as we move forward it makes the most sense for us to be called Mt. Comfort UMC. There are several important mission-minded reasons for this... 1) the immediate community is known as Mt. Comfort. 2) keeping the Mt. Comfort name connects us to the neighboring elementary school. 3) as development continues in this community SR 600/Mt. Comfort Rd/Olio Rd from McCordsville down to New Pal will be unified as the “Mt. Comfort Corridor”. For these, and other, reasons it doesn't make strategic sense to abandon the Mt. Comfort name. Besides, it's not like MTC is disappearing, the first three letters of Mt. Comfort are MTC ☺ Although the name may change for some, the heart and soul of our church will remain intact because the people are the heart and soul of the church.

What will Sunday mornings look like?

- Sunday mornings will feel very much like they currently do. There will be a traditional service in the sanctuary (liturgy, choir, hymns, etc.) and a contemporary service in the gym (band, media-driven, popcorn, etc.). Sunday School will remain for those who want to participate, and we may even find a way to have a more intentional fellowship time. The only change we should initially experience is a change in schedule (as Pastor Ethan can't be in two places and once) and the Cooperative Ministry Executive Team will be working hard at trying to figure out the best schedule possible.

How will this merger effect finances?

- Creating a new budget will ultimately be the responsibility of the Cooperative Ministry Executive Team, however we have done some preliminary work to get a general idea. Jack McKinney (MCUMC Treasurer) and Pastor Ethan sat down together to see what finances would look like if we meshed both congregations' approved 2019 budgets together, eliminated the overlap, and then applied actual income numbers from 2018 to the expenses. The results were very encouraging as the entirety of the merged budget was funded and then some. This has not been the case for either congregation in many years.

What will the church governance look like?

- Although both congregations are United Methodist their board/committee structures (Finance, Personnel/SPRC, Trustees, Church Council, etc.) are different. Both models fall well within the guidelines of the UMC. As we become one church the Cooperative Ministry Executive Team will be tasked with evaluating the best governance moving forward to make sure our church is able to run effectively and efficiently.

Will we hire another pastor or support staff?

- No, not initially anyway. It will be important to live as one church for a season to best evaluate our staffing needs. After a period of time Pastor Ethan and the church leaders will determine what additional staffing might be required to meet our current and future goals.

How will the legacy of the congregations be honored?

- Both congregations have a rich history and as we come together it will be crucial to honor both. One of the important things we've already discovered is that the critical elements of church (biblical foundation, missions & outreach, extending love, building relationships, and transforming lives) are ingrained into the cultures of both. Even though these elements may be done differently, they remain the driving force behind what it means to be the church. The legacies of each church will not be dismissed, they will be celebrated; the immeasurable work of the saints that brought us to this place will be honored as we share the storied histories as the foundation upon which we build the future. This will require of us all the embodiment of the Fruits of the Spirit and the extension of grace. These truly are church families that are coming together in all their glory and messiness.

Does this mean Pastor Ethan will be moved soon?

- In the United Methodist Church pastors are itinerant, which means they are moved to various churches throughout their career for a variety of reasons. However, in the conversations we've had with the Conference/District there is no intention to move Pastor Ethan anytime soon. The Conference/District are committed to this merger and want to see it be successful; what we are doing together continues to be new and innovative, and pastoral continuity is an important part. At the same time, Pastor Ethan doesn't want to move, he's been a part of this community for over 10 years and this continues to be the best place for his family. While there is never a guarantee that a pastor remains for any specific period of time the goal is Pastor Ethan will remain for the foreseeable future.

Will Pastor Ethan move into the parsonage?

- No, the decision was made to continue the current pastoral compensation package which includes a housing allowance. The parsonage is a huge asset for the church and could be used for many wonderful things, as it has been in the past when no appointed pastor has occupied it. The Cooperative Ministry Executive Team will be working on possible future uses of that building.

What about church membership?

- While it is true that Mt. Comfort UMC places more of an emphasis on church membership than MTC does, both agree that the primary focus of the church is "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." The heart of church membership is not in the vows taken, but the continual commitment (prayers, presence, service, gifts, witness) to the mission and vision of the church. In that sense, both churches have dedicated members who not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. Official church membership is an individual decision, anyone who wants to join our church will be welcomed to do so through the appropriate process.

How will we merge programming and ministries?

- The Cooperative Ministry Executive Team will be tasked with evaluating the current programs and ministries (Youth Group, Missions, Christian Education, etc.) of both congregations. The goal will be to bring like ministries/programs together in a healthy and mission-driven way. This won't be an easy process, we recognize both congregations have dedicated leaders and volunteers who have taken up the charge for specific ministries. Again, we ask for your prayers, patience, and grace as we walk together. We hope to build many more bridges than barriers.

If we don't like this change can we just wait it out?

- The decision to go in this direction is not one that was taken lightly; although some may feel it forced upon them it is the culmination of over a year in ministry partnership, Conference/District conversations, and (we whole-heartedly believe) God's design. Some

assume they can just wait it out and eventually things will go back to normal, the truth is we will be moving forward together creating a new normal as our two congregations become one. Failing to do so is not an option before us because the work of the church is too important. A long-time Mt. Comfort UMC member said, “I am going into this expecting it to work.” We know there are many who echo her sentiment. For those who are not yet there we ask for your patience, a little trust, and a great deal of faith as we journey forward proving that we are a better church together than we are apart.

This list of questions is not exhaustive, even as it may feel a little exhausting. We know there are more questions and concerns that are marinating in your heart. As those questions immerge please keep asking them; seek out the Pastors and/or a member of the Cooperative Ministry Executive Team (see below). We also ask that you hold back your assumptions as the process unfolds and reality sets in. Our new normal won't be a matter of flipping a switch, the changes ahead will happen gradually... but they also won't necessary wait until July. We hope you'll take advantage of future conversations (in whatever format they may come) as well as opportunities to get to know one another through ministries and events.

As we move forward, we are committed to a high level of communication and transparency. The Cooperative Ministry Executive Team meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month at 7pm, those meetings are open to everyone. This team will be reading a book together called *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger, we invite you to purchase and read this book along with us. We are well aware change is hard and scary, that many people wonder where they'll fit in this new normal; we want you to know that you are a valuable part of our future, a reality that we look forward to discovering together.

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