

# Helena UMC Discernment Process

## 11 Steps for Making a Decision Following the Ignatian Method

**1. What is to be decided during this time?: Where is God leading Helena UMC? Should we disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church? If so, where should we affiliate to best fulfill our work to advance His kingdom?**

**2. Over the next ~90 days, we will explore whether to remain a part of the United Methodist Church or whether God is calling us into another expression of Methodism to accomplish our work for His kingdom.**

**3. Please begin to pray for openness to God's will and freedom from prejudice and addictions.**

We ask that all members of our leadership team and entire worshipping congregation begin to pray. This means we ask to be free enough to be influenced only by one question: "which alternative will give the most glory to God by helping us to live into the Great Commandment and Great Commission?" Seek to be honest about your own deepest convictions, your authentic Christian beliefs, and where you sense the leading of the Holy Spirit. To achieve this, you may wish to discuss the matter with other spiritually mature persons who can help you. You may also find yourself serving to help others as well.

**4. Gather all the necessary information**

Your leaders are committed to finding out all relevant specifics relating to the decision: Who? What? Where? When? How much? Why? Be satisfactorily informed. Also, we are committed to relating this information to our membership. We will invite all members and interested parties to scheduled listening times with people who will be willing to offer information to you. We will also seek your questions and input. Please watch our website, bulletins, and emails throughout this process for important updates.

**5. Repeat the third step: Pray for openness to God's will.**

Pray about the matter again in light of the data you have gathered and the counsel of others. Most likely new feelings and questions arise that need to be shared with God so that He may continue to work with you to avoid personal feelings or biases and allow Him to guide you into His will. Remember the goal is to be influenced only by this one question: which alternative will give most glory to God by helping us to live into the Great Commandment and Great Commission?

**6. State your reasons for and reasons against each alternative in the proposal (See the table below.)**

Begin with a short prayer asking God to be with you as you make your lists. Ask particularly for light to see clearly what God chooses for you and what will best honor and serve God, your neighbor, and your true Christian conscience.

List all the reasons you can think of - no need to stop at 3 if you have more and no reason to list 3 if you find that too difficult at first. You can revisit this task as needed. Do not prejudge the merit of your reasons. You will evaluate them in the next step.

Stay with the United Methodist Church		Disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church	
Advantages for us:	Disadvantages for us:	Advantages for us:	Disadvantages for us:
1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3

**7. Do a formal evaluation of all the advantages and disadvantages.**

This evaluation aims to see which advantages and disadvantages seem to be coming from the influence of the Holy Spirit and which ones do not.

Attempt to get in contact with your motives and values. You may have to spend considerable time on this step to do this well. It may take days or weeks at several different times.

Repeat step 3, praying for openness and freedom. Pray for insight about factors that inhibit freedom and openness to God. Are there any?

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages by asking four questions:

- Which reasons are the most important? Why?
- What values are preserved or realized by each option? (Many advantages and disadvantages may be pointing to the same value.)
- Which option more evidently leads to God's service and better serves the growth of your true life in the Holy Spirit?
- Which option seems more consistent with your own faith journey and history with God?

**8. Observe the direction of your will while reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages.**

As you evaluate the choices, your desires will be influenced by the Holy Spirit; that is, your will becomes more inclined toward one option and less inclined toward the other. These inclinations may fluctuate between options. Pay attention to these inner movements. Pray for light from the Holy Spirit about them. Eventually, your will is likely to focus on one of the alternatives.

If your will does not settle on one choice but continues to fluctuate between the two, this is a signal to do some more prayer. Return to Step 3. Ask God to free you from any selfish inclinations and lead you to more worthy motives. Pray that the Holy Spirit draws your will and its desires to God's will.

**9. Ask God to give you feelings of consolation about the preferred option.**

The third state of discernment is to ask the Holy Spirit to stir feelings of spiritual consolation. These feelings may include joy, enthusiasm, deeper faith, greater hope and trust, greater love, confidence, and courage. These thoughts, desires, and feelings are all parts of your inner experience of the Holy Spirit guiding you to the truth. These feelings of consolation accompany your desires when they are clearly pointed toward loving and serving God, others, and your Christian conscience. They are very different from the feelings that accompany your desires when they are influenced by self-centered motives.

If your feelings fluctuate between consolation and desolation, return to Step 3: pray for freedom and openness to God.

**10. Trust in God and make your decision, even if you are not certain about it.**

Ultimately, in most situations, especially large group situations such as this, a decision must be made and a time frame has been established. Make your decision as you feel God is leading you and allow time to rest in that outcome.

**11. Confirm the decision.**

Live with the decision as you continue to pray for God's peace within your own spirit and for His will to be done in larger context relating to your decision.

Credit: Document adapted from one shared by Springville UMC