



ASBURY
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Discernment Team Final Report

April 18, 2023

Discernment Team

Asbury United Methodist Church

Discernment Team Recommendation

Recommendation

After more than a year of study, research, and prayer, the Asbury Discernment Team believes a disaffiliation vote would cause harm and division to our congregation, our fellowship, and our community outreach. The Discernment Team unanimously recommends that Asbury United Methodist Church not enter the disaffiliation process provided by The North Alabama Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Reasoning

In October 2022, the Discernment Team offered a series of listening sessions for the Asbury congregation to hear from one another and share their thoughts and feelings on issues related to human sexuality and the future of Asbury United Methodist Church. Twelve individual listening sessions were attended by a total of 323 individuals. Information from these sessions helped inform the Discernment Team's process and planning for data gathering and study.

In February 2023, a church-wide survey was distributed to 1,904 Asbury members and active participants via email and written copies. The survey assessed participants' sense of understanding and thoughts around human sexuality as it related to the context of the United Methodist Church and Paragraph 2553. 1,041 surveys were returned during the month-long period the survey was open; respondents were generally similar to the overall demographic makeup of membership at Asbury United Methodist Church with two exceptions - professing members under the age of 18 were underrepresented by 10% and professing members aged 61-75 were overrepresented by 14%.

The church-wide discernment survey results show a statistically relevant majority of Asbury United Methodist Church's members are willing to continue to worship, serve, and grow in mission with their Asbury brothers and sisters even though they may disagree on issues related to human sexuality. The Discernment Team found 35.83% of the congregation self-identified as being Traditional Compatibilists and 25.73% as being Progressive Compatibilists. When combined, these compatibilist categories amount to 61.56% of the Asbury congregation.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church continues to hold a traditional view of human sexuality which it has held since 1972 and any possible changes must come through a subsequent General Conference. The Discernment Team feels that Asbury United Methodist Church continues to be a traditional church with open hearts, open minds, and open doors that allow us to be a "big tent" church family open to varied perspectives, opinions, and views. This is a perceived strength given that over 60% of our survey respondents desired our church to strive for unity and given that God has placed our church in a diverse community.

The United Methodist Church's process for disaffiliation as provided in ¶2553 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church requires a 66.7% majority in a church-wide vote (church conference) for the congregation to leave the denomination. Based on data provided by the church-wide discernment survey, nearly two-thirds of the congregation (65.31%) self-identified as more traditional, made up of Traditional Non-Compatibilists (29.48%) and Traditional Compatibilist (35.83%). The Discernment Team acknowledges using self-identified categories do not necessarily indicate how a member may vote regarding disaffiliation. Considering the information shared in open-ended questions in the survey, listening session discussions, and conversations with groups in our church family, it is clear to the Discernment Team that there is a measurable desire in our church family to remain unified.

The Asbury Discernment Team's process and complete findings are provided in the full report contained in the following pages. The findings, supported by data from listening sessions and the church-wide survey (provided in the aggregate) are part of this report and support the recommendation to the Church Council.

The Discernment Team also recommends that this full report, with accompanying listening session and survey reports, be shared in its entirety with the congregation of Asbury United Methodist Church to provide as much transparency as possible.

Prayerfully submitted,

Henry Averyt
Brooks Burdette
Daniel Crawford
Rev. Maggie Dunaway
Rev. Mike Holly
Rev. Robert Mercer
Christy Miller
Jay Nichols
Mike Northrup
Jessica Norton
Janet O'Neil
Natan Shar

Table of Contents

Discernment Team Recommendation

Full Report

- Discernment Team Formation and Background5
- Listening Session Observations and Summary6
- Other Work Conducted.....7
- Church-Wide Survey Observations and Summary7
- Conclusion.....8

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Church Council Resolution – Discernment Team Formation 10
- Appendix 2: Listening Sessions Summary..... 12
- Appendix 3: Church-Wide Survey Summary 20
- Appendix 4: Communications sent to the Congregation 134
- Appendix 5: Discernment Process Timeline148
- Appendix 6: Referenced Book of Discipline Paragraphs149

Full Report

Discernment Team Formation and Background

In November 2021, the Church Council of Asbury United Methodist Church approved the creation of a twelve-person Discernment Team to help guide the congregation through a time of exploration and information gathering to determine who we are as a church body and who we hope to be in relation to the United Methodist Church, specifically regarding the issue of human sexuality. Those issues were expected to be addressed at the rescheduled General Conference to be held in 2022; however, the Conference was further postponed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Discernment Team continued with the task of gathering opinions from the congregation specifically concerning the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the conducting of same-sex marriages by United Methodist clergypersons.

Following the second postponement of General Conference 2020 and delay to spring 2024, the anxiety surrounding these issues has led some United Methodist congregations to explore the use of ¶2553 in The Book of Discipline in the United Methodist Church. This paragraph was introduced in the Discipline at the 2019 General Conference, and it allows United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate from the United Methodist denomination with a 2/3 majority vote at a Church Conference. In the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, 198 churches out of a total of 638 in the Conference were able to reach that 2/3 majority and completed all other steps to disaffiliate. Some of the churches in the North Alabama Conference that used the process allowed by ¶2553, but failed to reach a 2/3 majority, have reported that their churches experienced hurt, division, and the loss of members.

Per the resolution, The Discernment Team was made up of the chairpersons from the four committees required by the Book of Discipline (Church Council, Trustees, Finance, and Staff-Parish Relations) as well as our lay leader, our clergy, and four at-large members. In the event the chairperson of the committee was not willing or able to serve, the team worked to identify another representative from that same committee who would be willing and able to fulfill the charge of the Church Council. The four committee representatives, lay leader, and clergy comprised the nominating committee to fill the four at-large member positions to ensure broad age representation was present on the team. Rev. Dr. Bill Morgan was replaced on the Discernment Team by Rev. Mike Holly when Rev. Holly was appointed to Asbury United Methodist Church in July 2022. Robyn White, Director of Adult and Outreach Ministry, served as the Discernment Team's Spiritual Direction Facilitator and David Miller, Executive Director, provided administrative support to the Discernment Team. Neither White nor Miller were voting or voice members of the Discernment Team.

The members of the Discernment Team are:

Henry Averyt, Member at Large
Brooks Burdette, Trustees Committee
Daniel Crawford, Member at Large
Rev. Maggie Dunaway
Rev. Mike Holly
Rev. Robert Mercer

Christy Miller, Member at Large
Jay Nichols, Finance Committee
Mike Northrup, Church Council
Jessica Norton, Member at Large
Janet O'Neil, Lay Leader
Natan Shar, Staff-Parish Relations Committee

The Church Council Resolution forming the Discernment Team can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

Listening Session Observations and Summary

The Asbury United Methodist Church Discernment listening sessions began in October 2022. Twelve listening sessions were held with groups of less than 50 people. These sessions conducted primarily with established Sunday School classes and small groups. Open listening sessions were also held for those that either could not attend their scheduled session or were not members of a Sunday School class. Each session was led by three Discernment Team members, including a moderator, a note taker, and one member to assist as needed. A video with basic information and background was presented to start each session. The moderator led a discussion with questions designed to offer an opportunity for all to state their concerns and beliefs around human sexuality and disaffiliation in general. 323 individuals or 13.93% of the congregation took part in these sessions. The average age of a participant was 55 and was comprised of a similar number of men and women.

Participants were provided with a two-page handout with information about ground rules for the listening session for participants, the specific listening session questions to help guide discussion, the four categories of where a person may fall on a spectrum related to human sexuality and the United Methodist Church, and space for personal notes during the process.

The findings of the listening sessions informed the recommendation of the Discernment Team of Asbury United Methodist Church. The Discernment Team recommends the Listening Session Report be shared with the entire congregation of Asbury United Methodist Church to provide as much transparency as possible.

The Listening Session Report is contained in Appendix 2 of this report.

Other Work Conducted

The Discernment Team provided updates to the website of Asbury United Methodist Church with Frequently Asked Questions, a Timeline for the process, and other helpful links. Ten email updates were sent to the entire congregation between April 2021 and March 2023. Additionally, the congregation was invited to communicate questions, concerns, or comments directly to the Discernment Team via email at discernment@asburybham.org throughout the process.

Churchwide emails sent as part of official communication to the Asbury United Methodist Church congregation are included as Appendix 4 in this report.

In November 2022, an information session was held in Asbury United Methodist Church's Sanctuary where Rev. Mike Holly shared more information about the issues and events related to the theological divide within the United Methodist denomination and shared some early results from the listening sessions. Just under 300 people attended this session in-person. An abbreviated version of the same presentation was sent to the entire congregation via email on the same day.

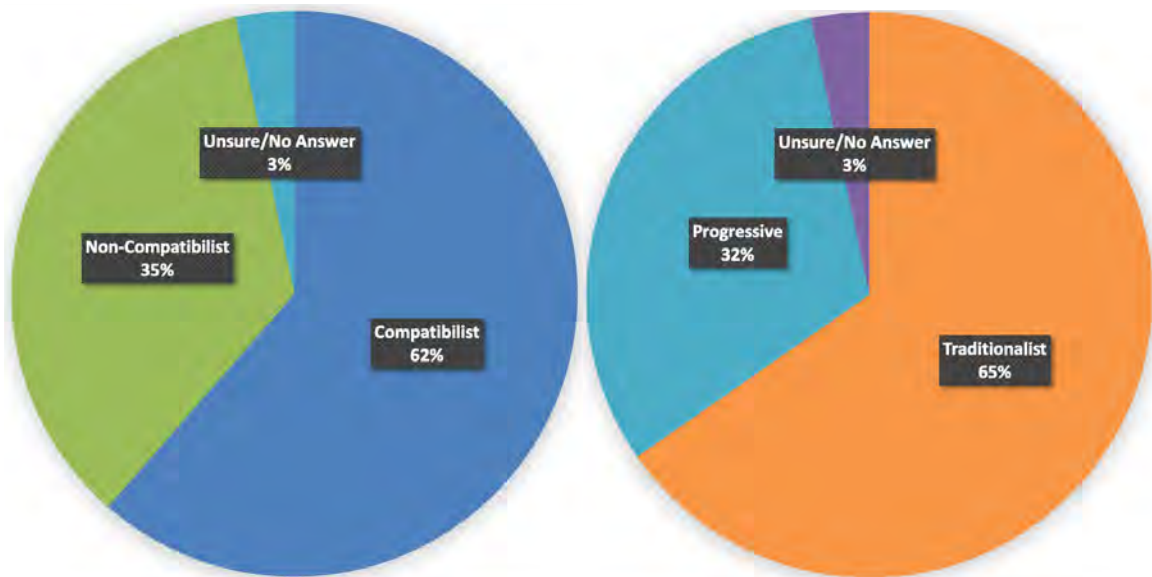
Church-Wide Discernment Survey Observations and Summary

The information gathered during the fall of 2022 was used to develop a survey for the membership and active participants of Asbury United Methodist Church. The survey assessed participants' sense of understanding and thoughts around human sexuality as it related to the context of the United Methodist Church and Paragraph 2553. The survey asked additional contextual questions around Asbury United Methodist Church's discernment process. The survey was administered by the Executive Director of Asbury United Methodist Church on behalf of the Discernment Team using SurveyMonkey online software. Participants received a unique link at the email address on record with Asbury UMC and paper copies were made available by request in the church office during the work week and at a centrally located table on Sunday mornings. Weekly reminder emails were sent via SurveyMonkey to those who had not yet completed the survey. Survey updates were provided during weekly worship services and communicated by email on February 23 and March 3, 2023.

Of the 1,904 surveys distributed, 1,041 members or active participants completed and returned the surveys between February 6, 2023, and March 5, 2023. Based on self-reported age, the response distribution was generally similar to the overall membership composition with two exceptions: professing members under the age of 18 were underrepresented by 10% and professing members aged 61-77 were overrepresented by 14%.

The Discernment Team found 35.83% of the congregation self-identified as being Traditional Compatibilists and 25.73% as being Progressive Compatibilists. When

combined, these compatibilist categories amount to 61.56% of the Asbury congregation, compared to 35.21% that identify as either Traditional Non-Compatibilist (29.57%) or Progressive Non-Compatibilist (5.64%). A small percentage of respondents (3.34%) were either unsure or did not answer the survey question.



The findings of the survey informed the recommendation of the Discernment Team of Asbury United Methodist Church. The Discernment Team recommends the Church-Wide Discernment Survey Report be shared with the entire congregation of Asbury United Methodist Church to provide as much transparency as possible.

The Church-Wide Discernment Survey Report is contained in Appendix 3 of this report.

Conclusion

The Discernment Team believes the research and data discussed in this report point to a bright future for Asbury United Methodist Church. The Discernment Team is encouraged by the overall tone of respect and love voiced by the majority of our church who may disagree on some issues but find more value in the power of our united fellowship and mission in Christ. The current health of Asbury United Methodist is evident in its recovery from the pandemic, growing attendance both in person and online, strong financial position, and impact throughout our local and global communities.

Our shared hope is that the research and data provided will reveal that the heart of this congregation is in unity and not in separation from one another. While we realize that this sentiment is not universal (as described in the church-wide survey data), it is possible with God's grace and help for people to maintain connection, ministry, and mission. To

maintain this unity, our church leadership will have to remain committed to listening to and respecting all views in future discernment.

Since 2019, Asbury United Methodist Church has given back more than \$1.7 million to local and global missions through our Missions in Action Committee and will distribute an additional \$471,000 in 2023. Our United Methodist pastoral team, led by Rev. Mike Holly, is energizing to our congregation. Since 2021, Asbury has welcomed 211 new members through professions of faith, transfer of membership, and confirmation classes. Our Student Ministry continues to grow and thrive with more than 100 middle and high school students actively participating in weekly small groups, Discovery Weekend, and retreats. The enthusiasm of our Children's Ministry is on display in worship every Sunday during the Children's Moment.

Asbury United Methodist Church is a healthy and vibrant congregation that is thriving in all measurable categories of church health. The Discernment Team believes any disaffiliation effort would diminish Asbury's bright future, fracture its Christian bonds, and greatly harm its Christian witness to the community. God continues to lead Asbury United Methodist Church as it faithfully follows in the steps of Jesus to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

Appendix 1: Church Council Resolution Regarding Discernment Team Formation



Discernment Process Proposal...*Paving a way forward*

For several decades, the United Methodist Church has been debating biblical and theological interpretations of homosexuality. Because it seems we have come to a theological impasse, there seems to be a growing consensus within the denomination that the best course of action is a gracious separation.

Several plans for separation have been proposed to try to provide a healthy theological home for those who significantly differ in their understanding: traditionalists (those who welcome LGBTQ persons but who wish to prohibit marriage and ordination of persons in same sex relationships); progressives (those who advocate for full inclusion, including marriage and ordination of persons in same sex relationships), and centrists (those who allow for differences of opinion).

In order for Asbury United Methodist Church to be ready to thoughtfully and prayerfully address denominational issues in a way that is open and transparent, the Pastoral Team is working with the leadership of three other churches in our area: Canterbury United Methodist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church and Bluff Park United Methodist Church. In conversation with these great churches, each community of faith has been asked to form a Discernment Team that will begin work in January of 2022 to help bring recommendations for Asbury to the Church Council and Charge Conference.

Each church will create a Discernment Team of 9 laity and 3 Clergy/staff. The process of formation of each team is up to each church. The

Discernment teams will have meetings within the local church as well as meeting with the teams from the other three churches.

We propose the Church Council affirm the creation of this Discernment Team. Our recommendation is to have the Discernment Team's laity membership be composed of the 5 chairs of our 2022 required committees and 4 additional at large positions.

Clergy: Rev. Dr. Bill Morgan, Rev. Robert Mercer, Rev. Maggie Dunaway

Lay Leader

Church Council

Finance Committee

Staff-Parish Relations Committee

Trustees Committee

4- At Large Laity

Ad Hoc (non-voting): David Miller, Church Administrator

(If the chairperson is not able or willing to serve, then another representative from the committee will be selected to serve on the Discernment Team.)

The four at large laity positions will be nominated by the team above. The ideal team would have a cross section of the Church at large so a variety of perspectives are represented.

The Discernment Team has no decision making power. This is a team that will prayerfully discern recommendations to make to the Church Council and Charge Conference at the appropriate time.



Listening Session Report

October 2022

Discernment Team

Asbury United Methodist Church

Table of Contents

Background Information	3
Listening Session Format and Structure	3
Listening Session Findings	4
Appendix A: Listening Session Handout	6

Background

Early in the process of collaborating as members of the Asbury UMC Discernment Team, the team determined a need to offer a forum from which to hear directly from the Asbury membership regarding issues related to human sexuality as addressed in Paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline (Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality). These listening sessions provided Asbury UMC members an opportunity to directly share feedback from their hearts and from their own understanding so that the Discernment Team could learn from that engagement and incorporate feedback and themes into future discernment work.

These sessions were not a time for voting or making plans for our future, but opportunities to allow the Holy Spirit to work through the conversations, letting all participants hear from our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Pastoral members of the Discernment Team would be excluded from these listening sessions to offer the church membership a forum where they could offer feedback and ask questions without a sense of direct oversight from church leadership in the room.

Listening Session Format and Structure

The Discernment Team offered a variety of listening sessions across several dates and times of day to accommodate as many of the members' availability as possible. Additionally, participation was capped at approximately 50 people per session to ensure there was time for all to participate and offer their feedback and ask questions, as desired.

Twelve individual listening sessions were held over a multi-week period in October 2022 with a total of 323 individuals attending (13.93% of the congregation). The average age of the participants was 55.21 based on sign-in sheets and data available from MyAsbury (Asbury UMC's ChMS); the average age of Asbury's membership is currently 47.1 based on the same dataset. Four of the listening sessions were done in groups of classes to be efficient with time as the Discernment Team felt that a group of less than 10 could impede conversation. Five general/open listening sessions were also provided for anyone in the church who were not able to attend a Sunday School session were given an opportunity. Participants were asked to only attend one session to allow as many individuals to participate as possible.

Specific listening sessions for professing members of the church who are under 18 were held separate from general sessions, allowing these groups the ability to participate in the process with others in their specific peer groups. Middle school aged members and high school aged students were segmented into separate listening sessions. Parents were encouraged not to attend these sessions to provide the students the space to engage in the process freely and thoughtfully without other influences. Student Ministry staff attended both sessions as observers but did not actively participate.

Listening sessions were led by three non-pastoral members of the Discernment Team. One served as moderator, one as notetaker, and another a supporting role to assist both roles as needed. Every listening session began with prayer followed by a short introductory video of

Rev. Mike Holly explaining the purpose, process, and topics for discussion during the listening session. The moderator asked a predetermined series of questions of each group as conversation prompts to promote discussion and engagement. While each session was presented with the same prompts, the moderator allowed the discussion to flow organically based on the participants and points raised during the session.

Participants were provided with a two-page handout with information about ground rules for the listening session for participants, the specific listening session questions to help guide discussion, the four categories of where a person may fall on a spectrum related to human sexuality and the United Methodist Church, and space for personal notes during the process.

The Listening Session handout provided to participants is contained in Appendix A of this report.

Listening Session Findings

The Discernment Team identified several themes and opportunities for next steps in the discernment process based on direct feedback from the Listening Sessions.

In several sessions, participants expressed a desire for more specific information around the United Methodist Church's position on human sexuality both generally and in the context of ¶ 2553. The Discernment Team worked with the Pastoral Team to develop an information session for the congregation to explore specific recurring themes and questions raised during the Listening Sessions. This information session would include a historical overview of the United Methodist Church's structure and polity, how the United Methodist Church has reached a crossroads regarding human sexuality, and next steps in Asbury's discernment process. The information session was held in the Sanctuary on November 16, 2022, and conducted by Rev. Mike Holly. An informational video was also sent to the entire Asbury congregation with the information covered during the in-person information session to ensure everyone had access to the information.

Additionally, an overwhelming theme regarding a desire to avoid division and splintering within our church was heard at almost every listening session. Several participants indicated they felt the discernment process in general was divisive and could potentially do more harm to the health of the congregation. The Discernment Team was intentionally sensitive to this feedback and ensured it was at the forefront of all future actions to help minimize division and anxiety among the congregation.

One area identified as divisive was the four categories that were presented as potential ways of grouping members on where they self-identified on issues relating to human sexuality and their desire and ability to worship alongside others within Asbury's congregation. Several participants expressed concerns about the descriptions for each category, feeling that they were not equal in their definition and were skewed in a way that favored one or more groups over another. It was also expressed that the categories themselves had the potential to create and promote division within Asbury simply by using

categories. The Discernment Team took this feedback and revised the categories to be more parallel in their descriptions, ensuring that each category reflected the same points, in the same order, and in the same tone to reduce concerns expressed. These changes were incorporated on the Discernment Team webpage as well as used in the church-wide survey.

In some sessions, a majority of interactions were from a more traditional point of view, often stating a clear belief that human sexuality was clearly defined in the Bible and Asbury should follow this understanding of biblical teaching and understanding. The more progressive voices expressed a different interpretation of human sexuality and a more accepting stance around the issue. Traditional voices also expressed concern about the United Methodist denomination, citing specific instances of polity that had not been followed in more public cases in the United States. In other sessions, there was a feeling of more equal viewpoints between traditional and progressive segments. In one session, it was overwhelmingly progressive and many of these participants expressed the belief that everyone should be welcomed and allowed full inclusion at Asbury, regardless of their stance on human sexuality. The Discernment Team acknowledges that many participants expressed strong feelings and sessions were often emotionally charged.

It was noted by the Discernment Team that many participants did not openly speak during the listening sessions but elected to wait until afterwards to speak with a team member directly. Several of these individuals indicated they were not comfortable speaking in the larger group for various reasons (i.e., speaking in front of a large group, fear of being judged for their views, not wanting to cause division, etc.). Many asked if there would be an opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions in a more confidential manner. This was considered when developing the church-wide survey to ensure open-ended questions were provided and confidentiality around individual responses was honored.

In all sessions, it was made clear that Asbury deeply values its missional focus and desires to continue serving the local and global communities. It was communicated that this has been part of the initial and ongoing fabric that makes Asbury such a unique congregation. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of participants felt that Asbury is a welcoming church, embracing the United Methodist tagline, “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.” and communicated a clear desire to continue being a place for all to worship, serve, and grow.

Appendix A: Listening Session Handout

Listening Session

Colossians 3:12-16a, 17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully.
- Listen patiently before formulating responses.
- Make notes of the things you would like to say while you wait your turn.
- Trust the moderators to guide the session.
- Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with a gracious God -- not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.

Listening Session Questions

- 1) How do you interpret John Wesley's quote, "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think"?
- 2) Can you see yourself working to achieve our church's mission alongside someone who may think differently than you in regards to human sexuality?
- 3) Define your hopes and concerns for the future of Asbury United Methodist?

Traditionalist Non-Compatibilists

These are church members whose understanding of the witness of Scripture regarding human sexuality is in line with the current wording of the Book of Discipline which forbids same-sex marriage and the ordination of people who are practicing homosexuals. Their concerns are of such importance to them that they would rather be in a denomination where all agree on these matters than be in a denomination where they would feel personally compromised by a diversity of views on human sexuality.

Traditionalist Compatibilists

These are church members who hold traditional views on human sexuality, much like the first category, but they believe they can still be compatible with others within the United Methodist connection who disagree with them. For instance, a pastor might not want to be forced into performing a same sex marriage, but can still be a part of a denomination where other pastors are allowed to perform such ceremonies. A traditionalist compatibilist holds tight to their own traditional understanding but also values the unity, mission, and impact of the United Methodist Church in so many areas beyond the scope of human sexuality.

Progressive Compatibilists

Some of these church members may have started out as Traditionalist Compatibilists, but their understanding and views have changed over time. They would like to see the church ordain anyone who qualifies and allow same-sex marriage for committed Christian couples. They understand that many of their respected traditionalist friends do not agree with them. They too, hold tight to their own progressive understanding and interpretation of Scripture but also value the Christian bond and impact of The United Methodist Church and are willing to remain in a diverse denomination.

Progressive Non-Compatibilists

Church members in this space look at these issues through an understanding of Scripture which calls for justice and the care of the marginalized. They strive for full inclusion of all regardless of sexual orientation including same sex marriages and ordination. This is of such high concern for them that they only want to be in a denomination that reflect these beliefs and priorities.

PERSONAL NOTES



Church-Wide Discernment Survey Summary

March 2023

Discernment Team

Asbury United Methodist Church

Table of Contents

Survey Content	3
Survey Administration	3
Participation Rate	3
Survey Findings	3
Overall Results	4
Age Segmentation – Under 18	4
Age Segmentation – 18-30	5
Age Segmentation – 31-45	5
Age Segmentation – 46-60	6
Age Segmentation – 61-75	6
Age Segmentation – 75+	7
Communications.....	8
Survey Administration	8
Participation Rate and Representativeness	9
Appendix A: Sample Survey.....	10
Appendix B: Overall Survey Results Graphs.....	20
Appendix C: Age Segmented Survey Results Graphs	
Age Segmented – Under 18.....	32
Age Segmented – 18-30.....	44
Age Segmented – 31-45.....	56
Age Segmented – 46-60	68
Age Segmented – 61-75.....	80
Age Segmented – 75+	92
Appendix D: Open Ended Question Response Analysis	
Q9: Additional Information Requests	104
Q14: Categorical Selection Reasoning	108
Q15: Concerns about the issues and using Paragraph 2553	109
Q16: Additional information for the Discernment Team	113

Survey Content

A single survey was tailored to the membership and active participants of Asbury United Methodist Church. The survey assessed participants' sense of understanding and thoughts around human sexuality as it relates to the context of the United Methodist Church and Paragraph 2553. The survey asked additional contextual questions around Asbury United Methodist Church's discernment process. Finally, the survey asked for information about key demographic and background characteristics that supplement demographic information available from institutional records.

Survey Administration

The survey launched on February 6 and closed March 5, 2023; 1,904 professing members and active participants (but non-members) were invited to take the survey from a total membership of 2,318. Those not receiving the invitation to participate lacked appropriate contact information to participate.

Participation Rate

Of the 1,904 invitations sent, 1,041 members or active participants completed the survey. Active participants were defined as non-members who actively participated in at least one aspect of Asbury United Methodist Church in the last year and a half (attendance through Bible study, worship, small groups, regular giving, etc.). Based on self-reported age, the response distribution was generally similar to the overall membership composition with two exceptions: professing members under the age of 18 were underrepresented by 10.00%, and professing members aged 61-75 were overrepresented by 14.31%.

Survey Findings

The Church-Wide Discernment Survey Report details a theologically diverse congregation and provides valuable context for a more refined understanding of the congregation's understanding of human sexuality as it relates to the United Methodist Church. That report also reveals compelling results that have overarching implications to understanding next steps for addressing concerns broadly shared in our congregation. This executive summary identifies those commonalities across age and theological categories and highlights key specific findings.

This overview of key results focuses primarily on those survey items that statistical analyses indicate are more representative of the underlying themes of the survey.

Overall Results

Examination of the findings shows that among respondents:

- The vast majority of respondents identified as a member of the congregation (91.22%).
- More than half of respondents have attended Asbury United Methodist Church for 10 or more years (57.18%).
- Gender did not play a significant factor as a comparable number of individuals identifying as female (56.70%) and male (42.04%) completed the survey. This is representative of the Asbury UMC congregation that is made up of 53.10% individuals that identify as female and 46.90% male.
- More than three-quarters (79.03%) of respondents indicated a General (46.75%) or Full (32.28%) understanding of the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination. An even higher percentage (82.89%) felt they understood the reason why Asbury UMC was engaged in a discernment process.
- A majority identified as Traditionalist (Compatibilist or Non-Compatibilist) in their theological perspective (65.31%).
- A majority felt they *could exist* within a denomination with individuals who did not share their views around the issues of human sexuality and self-identified as a Traditional or Progressive Compatibilist (61.56%).
- A minority felt they *could not exist* within a denomination with individuals who did not share their views around the issues of human sexuality and self-identified as Non-Compatibilists (35.11%).
- A majority indicated they attend a church-sponsored activity on a weekly basis (69.24%).

When segmented by age, findings of note include:

Under 18

- This demographic was disproportionately represented in responses, making up 1.56% of total responses while the total number of individuals in this age group make up 11.56% of the total membership.
- More than three quarters of respondents attend a church event weekly (86.67%).
- Half of the respondents identify as Progressive Compatibilist (50%). One quarter identify as Traditional Compatibilist (25.00%) or Progressive Non-Compatibilists (25.00%), respectively.
- A majority in this age demographic believe that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers (75.00%), believe all persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to marry in the United Methodist Church (75.00%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and in United Methodist churches (66.67%).

18 – 30

- This demographic was disproportionally represented in responses, making up 5.30% of total responses while the total number of individuals in this age group make up 14.02% of the total membership.
- Nearly half of respondents indicated they had attended Asbury between 10-25 years (45.10%).
- Nearly half of respondents identified themselves as Progressive Compatibilist (42.55%). Less than a quarter of respondents identified as either Traditional Compatibilist (21.28%) or Progressive Non-Compatibilist (23.40%). The fewest respondents identified as Traditional Non-Compatibilist (8.51%) while 4.26% were unsure of what category they identified as.
- A majority in this age demographic believe that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers (63.83%), believe all persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to marry in the United Methodist Church (65.96%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and in United Methodist churches (65.96%). More than a quarter of respondents felt self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers (27.66%), that marriage should only be between a man and a woman (29.79%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by or in the United Methodist Church (29.79%).

31 – 45

- This demographic is proportionally represented in responses, making up 16.84% of total responses while the total percentage of individuals in this age group make up 12.42% of the total membership.
- This age had a normal distribution of years at Asbury UMC, representing new members and long-time members. Nearly 60% of respondents identified as female in this age demographic.
- Two-thirds (66.67%) attend a church-sponsored activity on a weekly basis.
- Nearly half of respondents identified themselves as Progressive Compatibilist (42.55%). A little more than a quarter of respondents identified as Traditional Compatibilist (27.66%). 17.73% identified as Traditional Non-Compatibilists and the fewest number of respondents identified as Progressive Non-Compatibilist (9.22%). 2.84% were unsure of what category they identified as.
- This age demographic was more equally divided in their views relating to the Book of Discipline and the issues of human sexuality. While 44.76% felt self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, 43.36% felt they should not. Nearly half of respondents felt all persons should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church (48.95%) while over a third felt marriage should only be between a man and a woman (38.46%). A similar proportion felt ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and in United Methodist churches

(47.55%) while 39.16% felt ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by or in the United Methodist Church.

46 – 60

- This demographic slightly overrepresented in responses, making up 27.44% of total responses while the total percentages of individuals in this age group make up 21.14% of the total membership.
- Over half of those responding (57.95%) indicated they've attended Asbury for 10-25 years. 14.4% have attended Asbury for 5 years or less while 9.09% have attended for 25 years or more.
- More than half (61.74%) attend a church-sponsored activity on a weekly basis.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (66.39%) identified themselves as either Traditional Compatibilist (38.59%) or Progressive Compatibilist (27.80%). More than a quarter of respondents identified as Traditional Non-Compatibilists (26.56%) while 3.73% identified as Progressive Non-Compatibilist. 3.32% were unsure of what category they identified as.
- This age demographic felt more strongly that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers (52.48%), marriage should only be between a man and a woman (50.42%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by or in United Methodist churches (50.83%). Around a third of respondents felt that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers (30.17%), all persons should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church (34.17%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and in any United Methodist church (31.82%).

61 – 75

- This demographic disproportionately overrepresented in responses, making up 37.01% of total responses while the total percentages of individuals in this age group make up 22.69% of the total membership.
- Nearly two-thirds (63.77%) of respondents indicate they have attended Asbury UMC for 10-25 years (32.87%) or more than 25 years (30.90%).
- More than three quarters of respondents (77.40%) attend a church-sponsored activity on a weekly basis.
- Nearly three-fourths of respondents (74.06%) in this demographic identify as "Traditional" with 38.78% identifying as Traditional Compatibilist and 35.28% as Traditional Non-Compatibilist. 19.83% identified as Progressive Compatibilist.
- This age demographic is significantly more polarized in their feelings around human sexuality with 63.48% feeling that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers, 63.08% feeling that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, and 61.10% feeling that ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in United Methodist churches. Around a

quarter of respondents felt oppositely that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers (22.90%), all persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist church (26.45%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers in any United Methodist Church (25.07%).

75+

- This demographic slightly overrepresented in responses, making up 18.09% of total responses while the total percentages of individuals in this age group make up 11.09% of the total membership.
- Nearly half of respondents have attended Asbury UMC for 10-25 years (45.66%) with another 12.72% having attended more than 25 years. This age demographic indicates the longest participant tenure.
- This age demographic was almost equally represented by gender with 50.57% identifying as female and 48.85% identifying as male.
- 72.83% indicated weekly attendance at any church-sponsored activity. This demographic was the most likely to respond with 'Prefer not to Answer' when asked about involvement at 10.98%.
- The 75+ age demographic was the most likely to indicate not accessing resources provided by the Discernment Team or conducting self-study/research (23.67%).
- More than three-fourths of respondents (75.93%) in this demographic identify as "Traditional" with 37.04% identifying as Traditional Compatibilist and 38.89% as Traditional Non-Compatibilist. This demographic was the least likely to identify in either Progressive category (17.90%) with 14.81% identifying as Progressive Compatibilist and 3.04% identifying as Progressive Non-Compatibilist. 6.17% were unsure of what category they identified as.
- This age demographic is the most polarized compared to all others in their feelings around human sexuality with 64.56% feeling that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers, 67.92% feeling that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, and 65.63% feeling that ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in United Methodist churches. Less than 20% of respondents felt oppositely that self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers (15.82%), all persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist church (18.87%), and ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers in any United Methodist Church (16.25%). This age demographic also identified with the largest population selecting 'I do not have enough information to decide' or 'I do not have an opinion either way' when asked the same questions regarding human sexuality (13.92%, 10.06%, and 10.63% respectively).

Communications

In preparation for the church-wide Discernment Survey, congregational communications began in 2022 announcing the process for Asbury United Methodist Church's internal discernment process. A proposed timeline was released to the congregation on November 16, 2022, both on the Discernment webpage (www.asburybham.org/discernment) and via email that outlined the congregational survey would be released in early-2023. An in-person information session was held on November 16 with Rev. Mike Holly, Senior Pastor to discuss the discernment process and issues surrounding human sexuality in the United Methodist Church. A video was also sent to the entire congregation on November 16 covering the same materials that were presented during the in-person session.

Additional email communications were sent on December 12 summarizing events that took place on December 10 at the North Alabama Conference Special Called Annual Conference. The same email reminded the congregation that a survey would be sent in early 2023. On January 24, an email was sent to the entire congregation encouraging professing members and active members to update their personal information, including email addresses to ensure they would receive the church-wide Discernment Survey as well as review materials made available by the Discernment Team prior to the survey's distribution.

Survey Administration

The survey was administered by the Executive Director of Asbury United Methodist Church on behalf of the Discernment Team using SurveyMonkey online software. The Discernment Survey launched on February 6 and closed on March 6, 2023; 1,747 professing members or active participants of Asbury United Methodist Church were invited to take the survey. Participants received a unique link at the email address on record within MyAsbury (Asbury UMC's ChMS). Paper copies were also made available by request in the church office during the work week and at a centrally located table on Sunday mornings. Weekly reminder emails were sent via SurveyMonkey to those who had not yet completed the survey. Survey updates were provided during weekly worship services as well as communicated by email on February 23 and March 3, 2023. Throughout the process, the congregation was encouraged to contact the Discernment Team by email (discernment@asburybham.org) if they experienced issues completing the survey, did not receive a unique link to complete the survey, or desired to provide additional information.

Survey data is encrypted and stored in a secure drive that only the Executive Director can access. Any identifying information such as email, IP address, or self-disclosed information were erased from the participant's response prior to being downloaded from the SurveyMonkey software to protect individual information.

Participation Rates and Representativeness

Survey method rates were: SurveyMonkey unique links 52.20% (n=914/1,751); direct links 78.02% (n=71/91); paper surveys 90.32% (n=56/62). An overall participation rate of 54.67% (n=1,041/1,904) from individuals provided with a unique link or paper survey. An overall congregational response of 44.91% (n=1,041/2,318) from professing members on record within MyAsbury (Asbury UMC's ChMS).

Representativeness was observed by respondents self-identifying membership status, gender, and age. Membership was well represented with 91.22% (n=946/1,041) identifying as a member of Asbury United Methodist Church; 7.81% (n=81/1,041) identified as a non-member and 1.34% (n=14/1,041) were unsure or skipped the question.

Gender was representative of the professing membership with 56.70% (n=588/1,041) individuals identifying as female and 42.04% (n=436/1,041) as male completed the survey; 1.63% (n=17/1,041) did not answer or skipped the question. This is representative of the Asbury UMC congregation that is made up of 53.10% individuals that identify as female and 46.90% male.

Age was less representative of the professing membership of Asbury United Methodist Church. Age was broken down into seven categories: Under 18, 18-30, 31-45, 46-60, 61-75, 75+, and No Age/No Answer.

Under 18 comprised 1.56% (n=15/1,041) of survey responses but represents 11.56% (n=268/2,318) of total membership. 18-30 comprised 5.30% (n=51/1,041) of survey responses but represents 14.02% (n=325/2,318) of total membership; both age groups were statistically underrepresented in the total results.

31-45 comprised 16.84% (n=162/1,041) of survey responses and 12.42% (n=288/2,318) of total membership. 46-60 comprised 37.01% (n=356/1,041) of survey responses and 21.14% (n=490/2,318) of total membership; in both groups, respondents were generally similar to the overall population.

61-75 comprised 37.01% (n=356/1,041) of survey responses and 22.69% (n=526/2,318) of total membership; this represents a significant overrepresentation of this age demographic in the survey. 75+ comprised 18.09% (n=174/1,041) of survey responses and 11.09% (n=257/2,318) of total membership; this represents a slight overrepresentation of this age demographic in the survey. 1.98% (n=19/1,041) selected not to provide an age in the survey while 7.08% (n=164/2,318) of total membership does not have a recorded age in MyAsbury (Asbury UMC's ChMS).

Appendix A: Sample Survey

Asbury United Methodist Church Discernment Survey

Introduction

Over the past year, the Discernment Team at Asbury United Methodist Church has worked to provide information, resources, and opportunities for the congregation to learn about the issues surrounding human sexuality and the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Church has been debating questions and stances regarding our views of human sexuality since General Conference 1972.

In February 2019, a special called General Conference was held to focus discussions on human sexuality within the denomination and a decision was made to maintain the language in our Book of Discipline that prohibits marriage and ordination for self-avowed and practicing homosexuals and added stricter accountability for violating these policies; this was adopted by a vote of 53% to 47%. At this same special called General Conference in 2019, the delegates added a new paragraph to the Book of Discipline. This paragraph (§ 2553) allows for churches to leave the United Methodist denomination through a process known as disaffiliation (but only on the grounds of opposition to issues related to human sexuality). The process of disaffiliation in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church includes a three-month discernment process concluding in a church-wide vote at a special called conference of church members, as well as the payment of several financial expenses. The disaffiliation is not final until the Annual Conference votes to approve the church's decision. Remaining United Methodist requires no action from the members of Asbury United Methodist Church or from Asbury's Church Council.

The people of the United Methodist Church, especially members in the United States, were and continue to be divided over the decision made during the special called General Conference. Plans were made to continue working towards a way forward during the regularly scheduled General Conference in 2020. However, that meeting was postponed several times due to the global pandemic and has been pushed once again to 2024.

In November 2021, the Church Council of Asbury United Methodist Church approved the creation of a twelve-person Discernment Team comprised of representatives from the four committees required by the Book of Discipline (Church Council, Trustees, Finance, and Staff-Parish Relations), clergy, lay leader, and four at-large members, to help guide our congregation through a period of prayerful exploration and information gathering. The Discernment Team is not a decision-making body and has no ability to decide anything on behalf of the congregation. In a congregation of over 2,200 members, the work of a group like the Discernment Team will make this process easier to collect and glean meaningful observations. Their work will be provided to the Church Council to offer guidance on the best way forward.

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO PARTICIPATE IN IS A SURVEY. IT IS NOT A VOTE. It is designed to listen so that your unique voice may be heard.

Throughout this survey, you will be asked questions regarding your understanding around human sexuality as it relates to the United Methodist Church, your personal beliefs, and your hopes for Asbury United Methodist Church moving forward. This survey is part of a prayerful congregational discernment process and it is a critical step in allowing the Discernment Team to determine and recommend the next right move for our church family.

If you have not done so already, you are encouraged to learn more about where we are as a church and denomination in regards to discernment and disaffiliation regarding human sexuality in the Church by visiting www.asburybham.org/survey.

This section left intentionally blank.

Demographic Information

Tell us more about yourself and your relationship to Asbury United Methodist Church! This information will be used to explore how segments of our church feel about the questions that follow. All data will remain confidential and will be used in the aggregate when reporting.

Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 – 5 years
- 5 – 10 years
- 10 – 25 years
- More than 25 years
- Prefer not to Answer

What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18 – 30
- 31 – 45
- 46 – 60
- 61 – 75
- 75+
- Prefer not to Answer

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer no to Answer

What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly

- Occasionally
- Prefer not to Answer

Understanding of Information

Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

- Discernment Team Webpage (www.asburybham.org/discernment)
 - Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)
 - Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)
 - Self-Study/Research
 - None
 - Other (please specify) _____
-

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

- 1 – No Understanding
- 2 – Minimal Understanding
- 3 – Moderate Understanding
- 4 – General Understanding
- 5 – Full Understanding

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

- 1 – No Understanding
- 2 – Minimal Understanding
- 3 – Moderate Understanding
- 4 – General Understanding
- 5 – Full Understanding

What additional information or resources would you like to see provided by the Discernment Team to the congregation?

Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

As a global denomination, the United Methodist Church is having conversations about church law, mainly around the issue of human sexuality, and some congregations and individuals have chosen to splinter off into other denominations. If you would like more information about the official stance of the United Methodist Church on human sexuality, visit <https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-nurturing-community#human-sexuality>.

In this section, you will be asked about your personal beliefs regarding human sexuality as it relates to the United Methodist Church. You are encouraged to read each statement carefully before responding as some of the questions are similar but ask different questions.

Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

- Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers
- Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church
- Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers
- I do not have enough information to decide
- I do not have an opinion either way

Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

- Marriage should only be between a man and a woman
- All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church
- All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church
- I do not have enough information to decide
- I do not have an opinion either way

Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” Which of the following statements best describes your position?

- Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church
- Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in any United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church
- Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church
- I do not have enough information to decide
- I do not have an opinion either way

This section left intentionally blank.

During the Listening Sessions and Information Sessions held in Fall 2022, four general categories were discussed on where an individual might fall on issues relating to human sexuality. Please review the chart below before proceeding to the next question.

Traditional Non-Compatibilist

Church members in this category hold an interpretation of Scripture in line with the current wording of The Book of Discipline which forbids same-sex marriage and the ordination of persons who are practicing homosexuals. Their concerns about fidelity to this interpretation of Scripture and to the commands from Jesus for holiness are of such importance to them that they would rather be in a denomination where all agree on these matters than be in a denomination or local church where they would feel personally compromised by diverse views on human sexuality.

Traditional Compatibilist

Church members in this category hold similar theologically traditional views on human sexuality as those in the first category. The difference is that they believe that they can still be compatible with others within the United Methodist denomination who might disagree with them. A traditional compatibilist holds to their own traditional interpretation of Scripture, but also values the unity, mission, and impact of the United Methodist Church and all of the other areas where Jesus calls us to become more like him. They would likely strive for unity despite our differences.

Progressive Compatibilist

Church members in this category understand that there are varying Christian perspectives on human sexuality as well as in the interpretation of Scriptures related to human sexuality. They would like to see the United Methodist Church as a denomination offer ordination to all people who are clearly called by God and also offer marriage to committed Christian same-sex couples. They hold their own progressive interpretation of Scripture, but also value the unity, mission, and impact of the United Methodist Church and all of the other areas where Jesus calls us to become more like him. They would likely strive for unity despite our differences.

Progressive Non-Compatibilist

Church members in this category have deep concerns for the Scripture's call for justice to all people and Jesus' deferential care of the marginalized. They hold a progressive interpretation of Scripture that they feel calls them to strive for full inclusion in the life of the church for all people, including those currently prohibited from marrying or serving as clergy. This is such a high value for this group that they only want to be in a denomination that reflects these beliefs and will continue to work for serious change within the United Methodist denomination.

Please carefully read the following information before answering the next question:

- Paragraph 2553 (§ 2553) of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states that the Church Council of a local church alone may vote on entering into the process of disaffiliation. A simple majority is required in order to enter into the disaffiliation process.
- Entering into the disaffiliation process could lead to the setting of a Church Conference in consultation with the District Superintendent where every church member would have a vote as long as they attended the Church Conference in person.
- § 2553 requires that a 2/3 majority of those present at the Church Conference approve of disaffiliation. Any result below a 2/3 majority would be a decision for the church to remain within the United Methodist denomination.
- A church should make this decision solely upon the information covered in this survey and should not attempt to disaffiliate in order to retain a pastor, safeguard itself from unfounded threats to other theological issues, or even save the monies allocated for ministry and mission apportionments to our Annual Conference or to the United Methodist denomination.
- The Trustees of the North Alabama Conference are allowing churches to use the process from § 2553 beyond December 2023. Information is available on the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church website related to our annual conference processes (<https://www.umcna.org/discerning-our-future>).
- This process cannot be repeated so the outcome of the process is the final result.

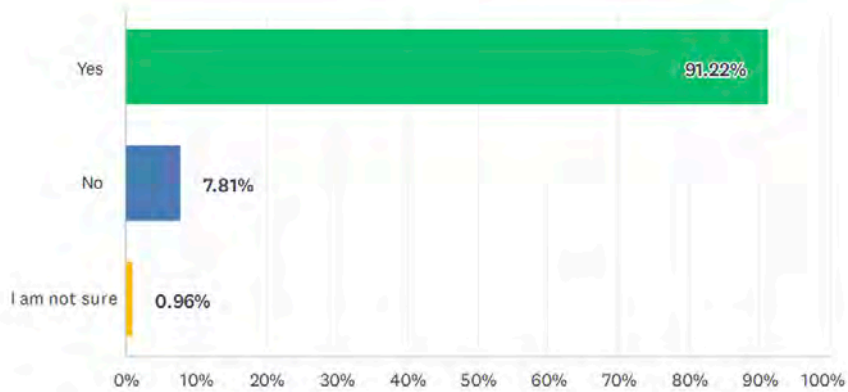
Knowing this information, please answer the following questions:

What concerns you most about the issue before us or the implications of using Paragraph 2553 to enter into the Annual Conference process for Disaffiliation?

Appendix B: Overall Graphs

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

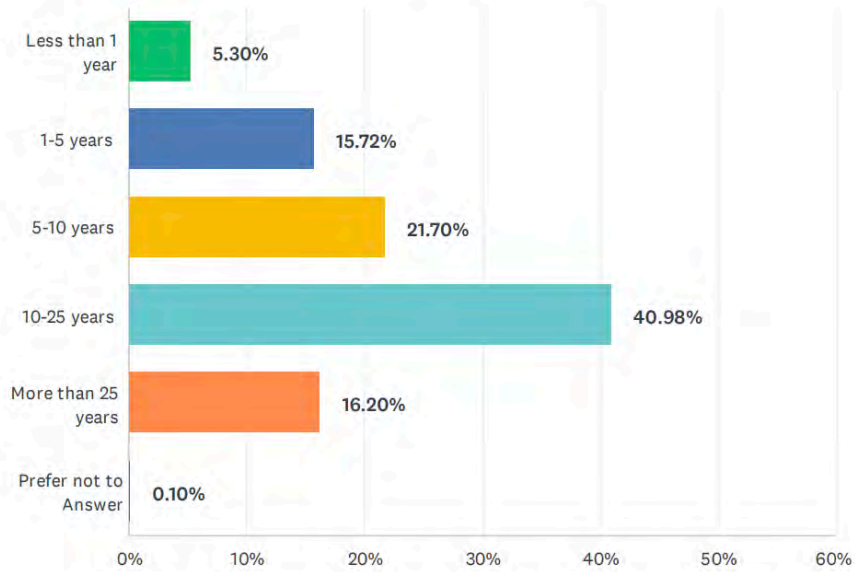
Answered: 1,037 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	91.22%	946
No	7.81%	81
I am not sure	0.96%	10
TOTAL		1,037

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

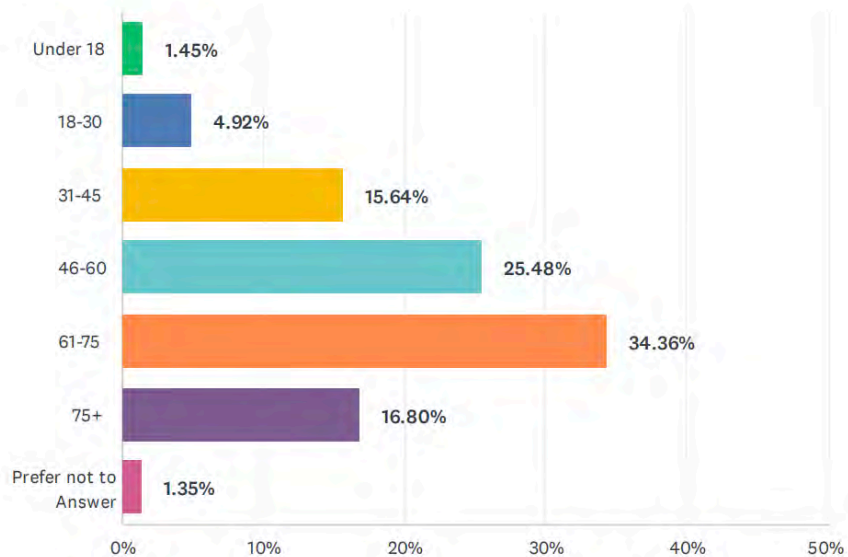
Answered: 1,037 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	5.30%	55
1-5 years	15.72%	163
5-10 years	21.70%	225
10-25 years	40.98%	425
More than 25 years	16.20%	168
Prefer not to Answer	0.10%	1
TOTAL		1,037

Q3 What is your age?

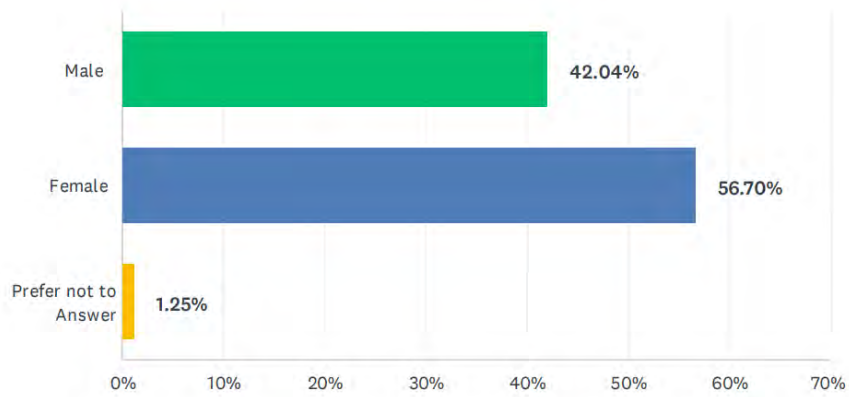
Answered: 1,036 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	1.45%	15
18-30	4.92%	51
31-45	15.64%	162
46-60	25.48%	264
61-75	34.36%	356
75+	16.80%	174
Prefer not to Answer	1.35%	14
TOTAL		1,036

Q4 What is your gender?

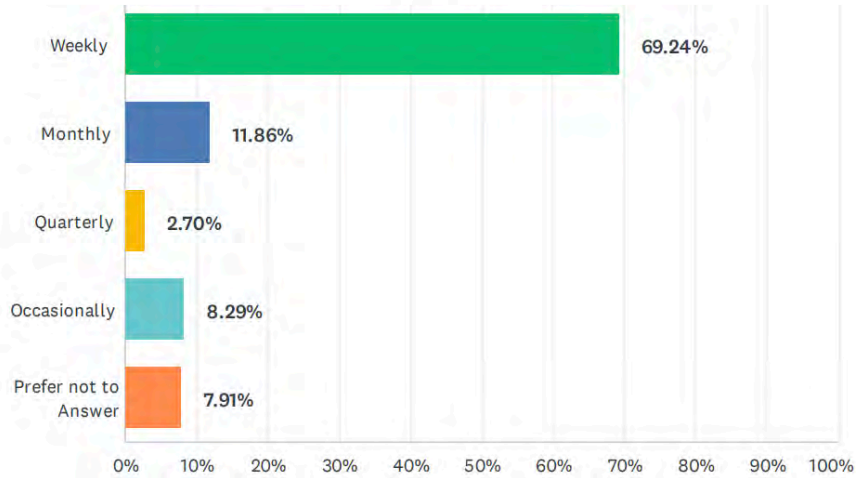
Answered: 1,037 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	42.04%	436
Female	56.70%	588
Prefer not to Answer	1.25%	13
TOTAL		1,037

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

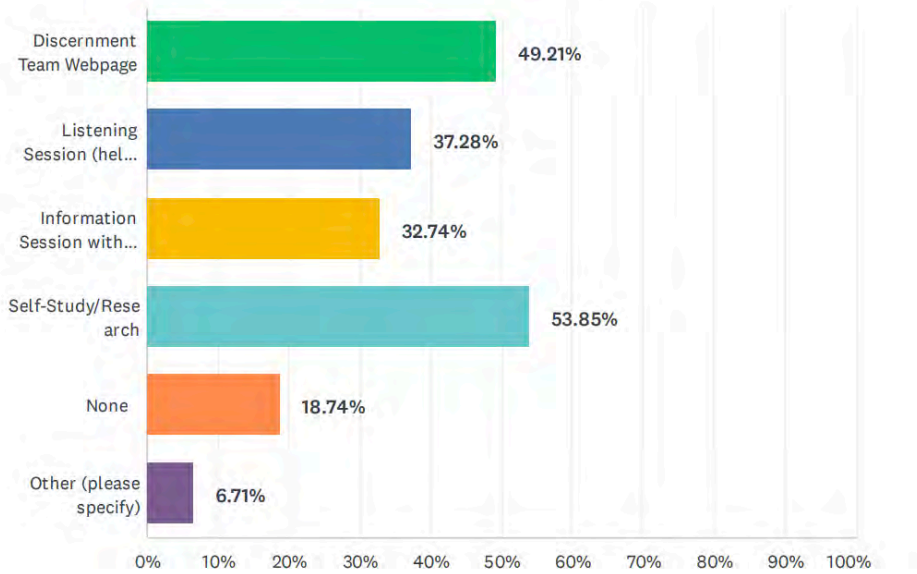
Answered: 1,037 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	69.24%	718
Monthly	11.86%	123
Quarterly	2.70%	28
Occasionally	8.29%	86
Prefer not to Answer	7.91%	82
TOTAL		1,037

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

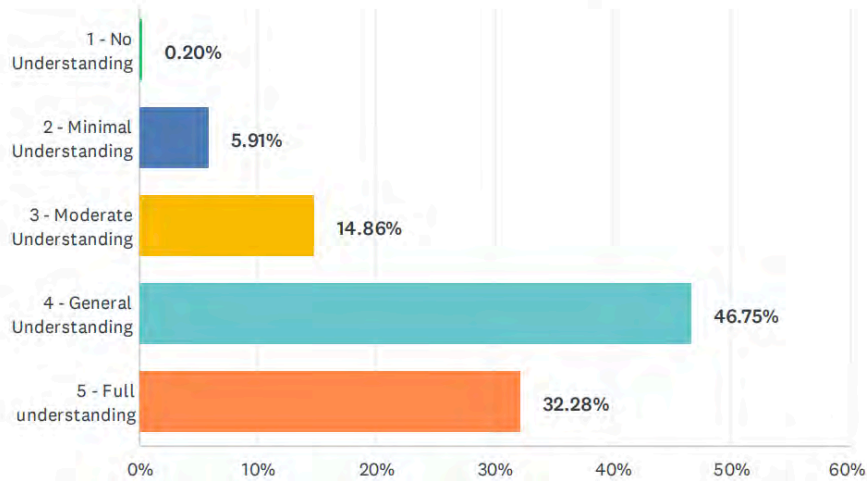
Answered: 1,014 Skipped: 27



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	49.21%	499
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	37.28%	378
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	32.74%	332
Self-Study/Research	53.85%	546
None	18.74%	190
Other (please specify)	6.71%	68
Total Respondents: 1,014		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

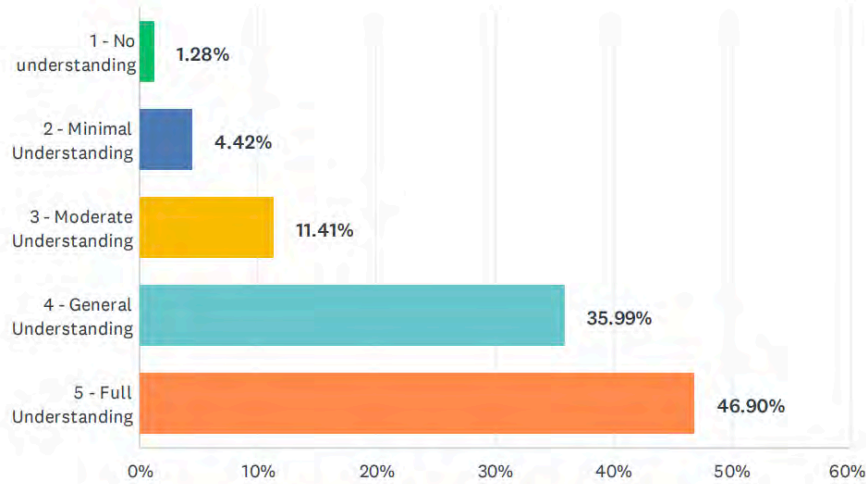
Answered: 1,016 Skipped: 25



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.20%	2
2 - Minimal Understanding	5.91%	60
3 - Moderate Understanding	14.86%	151
4 - General Understanding	46.75%	475
5 - Full understanding	32.28%	328
TOTAL		1,016

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

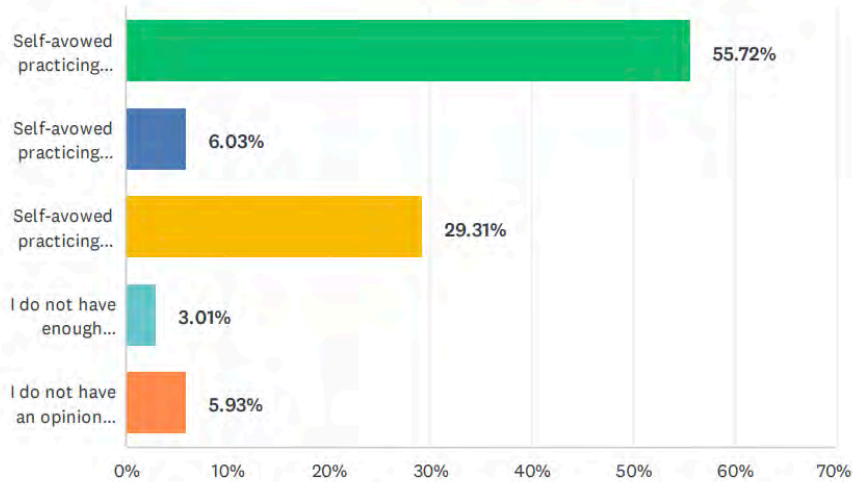
Answered: 1,017 Skipped: 24



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	1.28%	13
2 - Minimal Understanding	4.42%	45
3 - Moderate Understanding	11.41%	116
4 - General Understanding	35.99%	366
5 - Full Understanding	46.90%	477
TOTAL		1,017

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

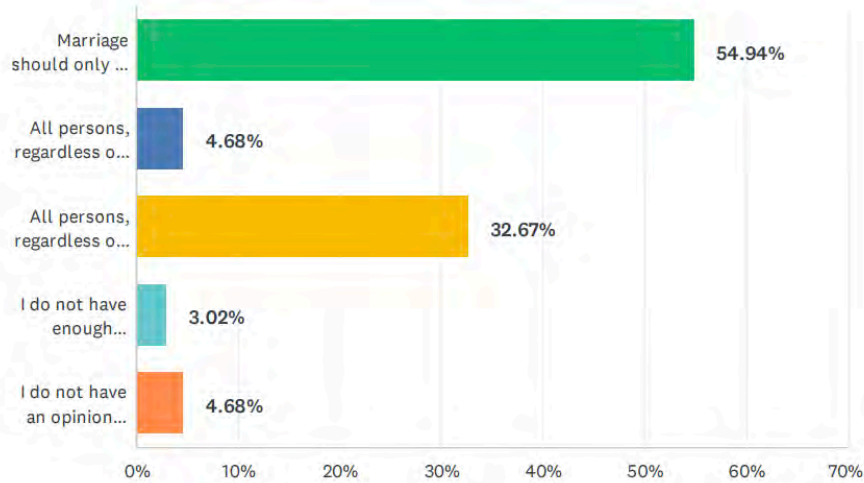
Answered: 962 Skipped: 79



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	55.72%	536
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	6.03%	58
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	29.31%	282
I do not have enough information to decide	3.01%	29
I do not have an opinion either way	5.93%	57
TOTAL		962

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

Answered: 961 Skipped: 80

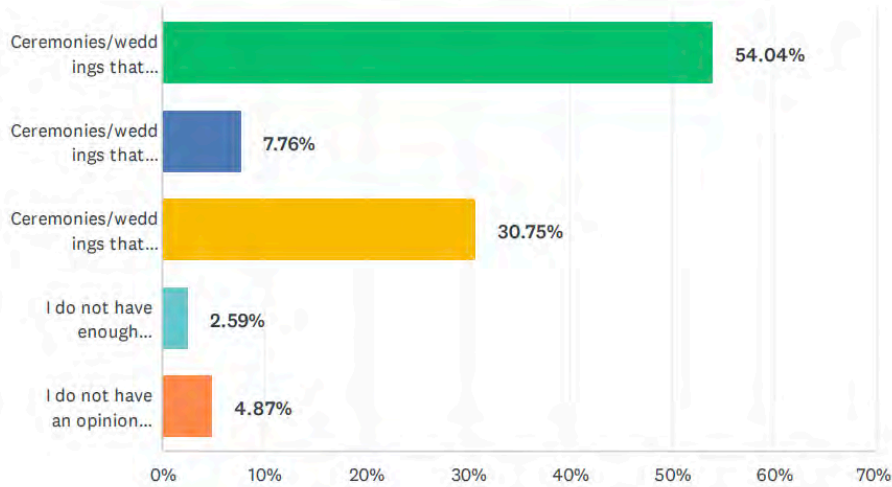


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	54.94%	528
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	4.68%	45
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	32.67%	314
I do not have enough information to decide	3.02%	29
I do not have an opinion either way	4.68%	45
TOTAL		961

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

Which of the following statements best describes your position?

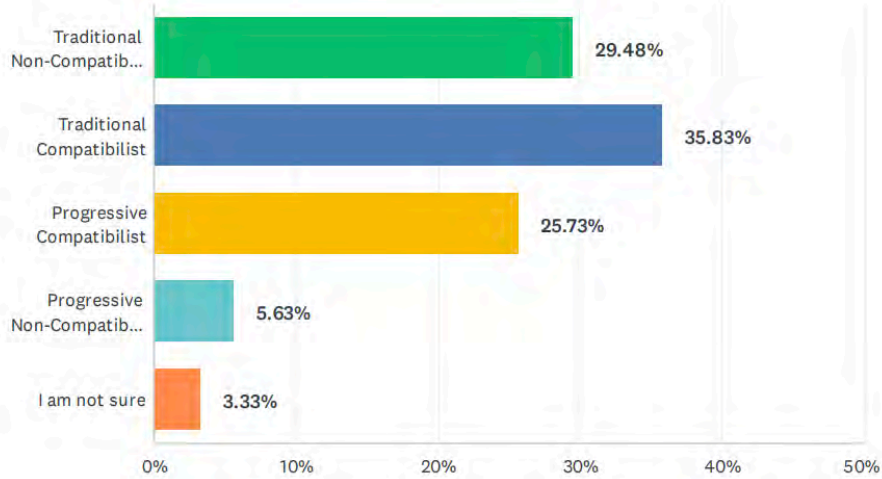
Answered: 966 Skipped: 75



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	54.04% 522
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	7.76% 75
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	30.75% 297
I do not have enough information to decide	2.59% 25
I do not have an opinion either way	4.87% 47
TOTAL	966

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 960 Skipped: 81



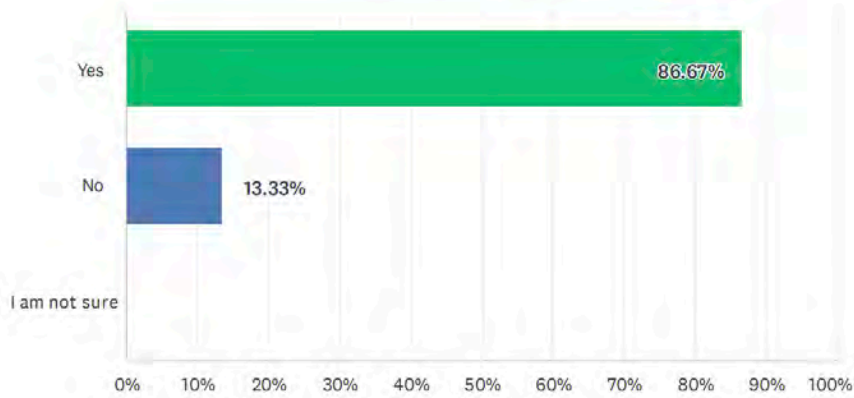
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	29.48%	283
Traditional Compatibilist	35.83%	344
Progressive Compatibilist	25.73%	247
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	5.63%	54
I am not sure	3.33%	32
TOTAL		960

Appendix C: Age Segmented Survey Results Graphs

Age Segmented: Under 18

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

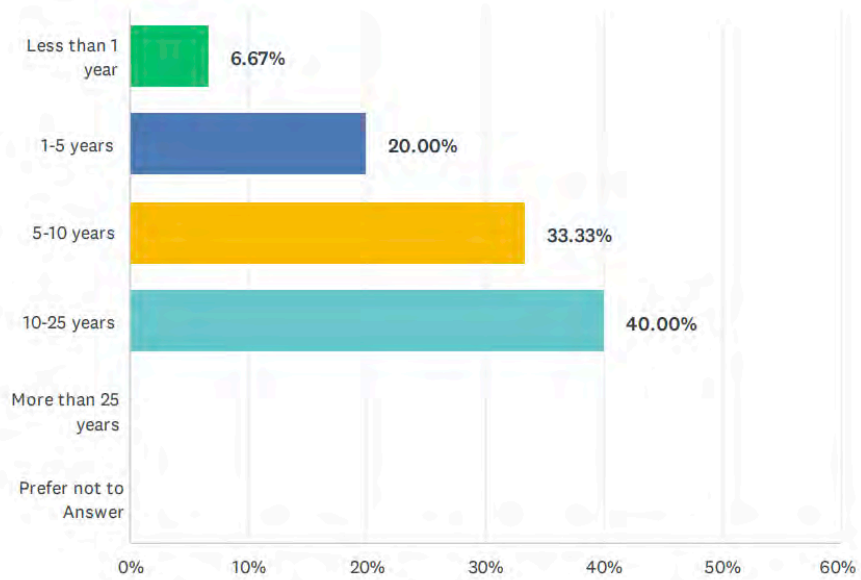
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	86.67%	13
No	13.33%	2
I am not sure	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

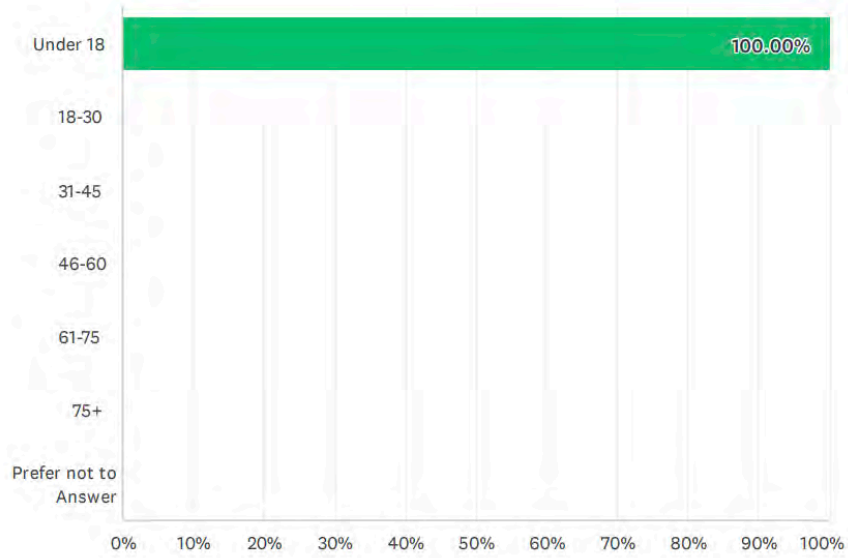
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	6.67%	1
1-5 years	20.00%	3
5-10 years	33.33%	5
10-25 years	40.00%	6
More than 25 years	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Q3 What is your age?

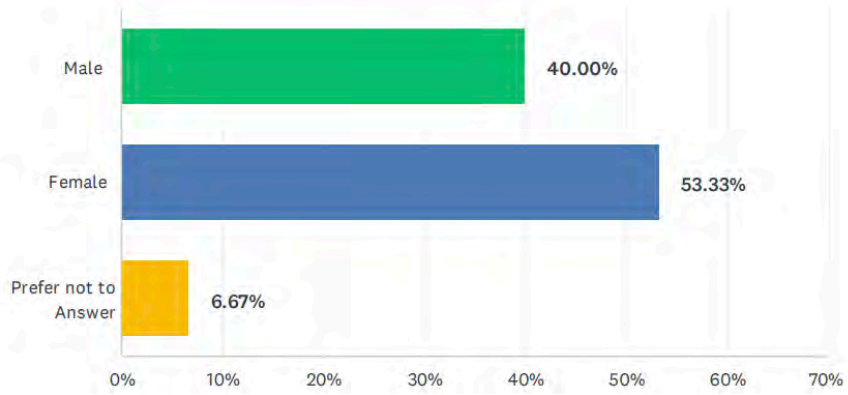
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	100.00%	15
18-30	0.00%	0
31-45	0.00%	0
46-60	0.00%	0
61-75	0.00%	0
75+	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Q4 What is your gender?

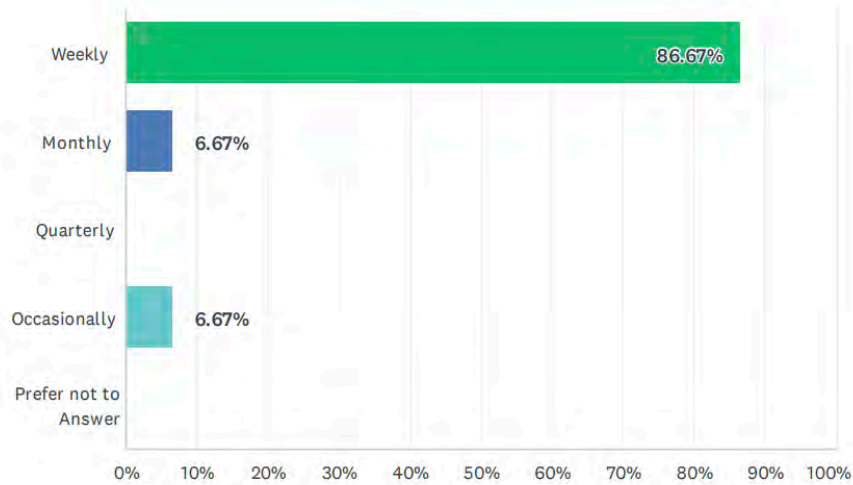
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	40.00%	6
Female	53.33%	8
Prefer not to Answer	6.67%	1
TOTAL		15

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

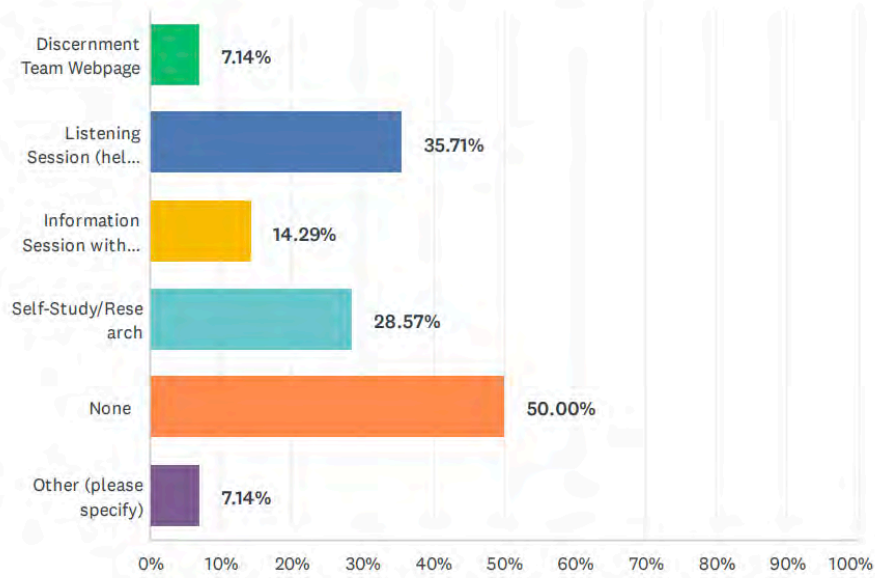
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	86.67%	13
Monthly	6.67%	1
Quarterly	0.00%	0
Occasionally	6.67%	1
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

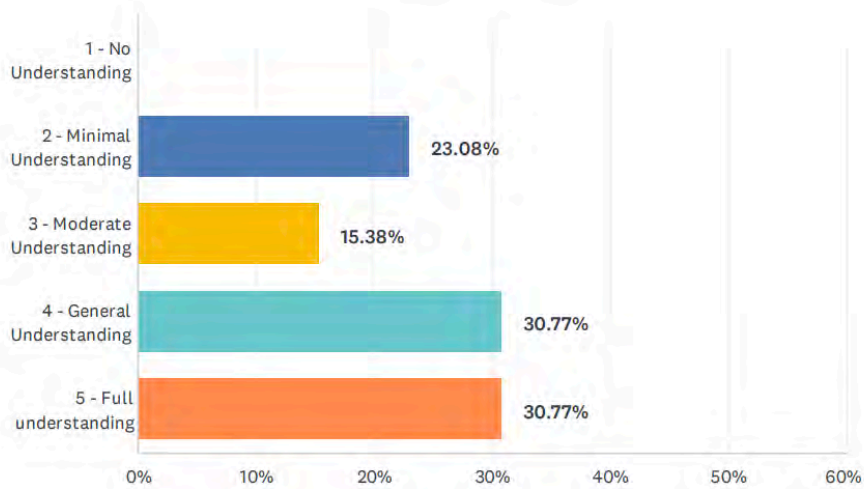
Answered: 14 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	7.14%	1
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	35.71%	5
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	14.29%	2
Self-Study/Research	28.57%	4
None	50.00%	7
Other (please specify)	7.14%	1
Total Respondents: 14		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

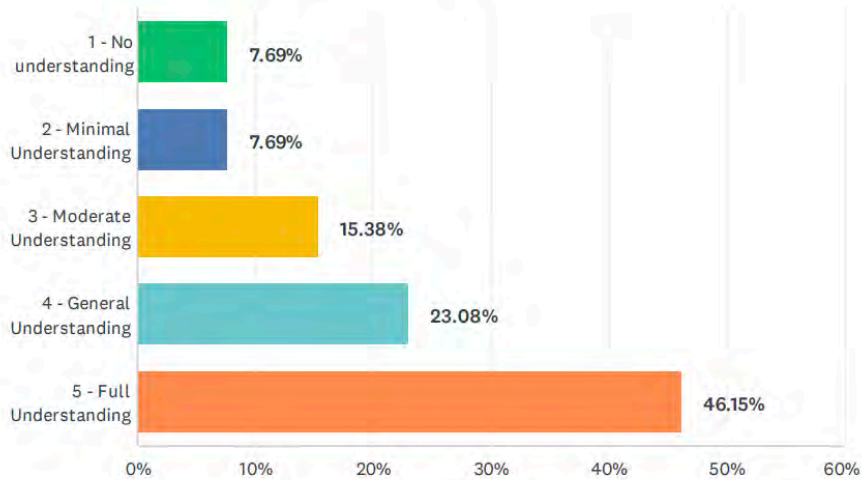
Answered: 13 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.00%	0
2 - Minimal Understanding	23.08%	3
3 - Moderate Understanding	15.38%	2
4 - General Understanding	30.77%	4
5 - Full understanding	30.77%	4
TOTAL		13

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

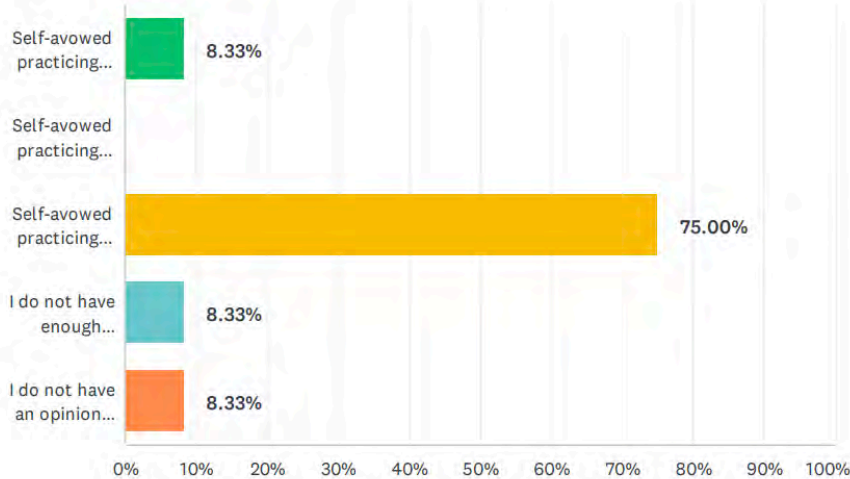
Answered: 13 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	7.69%	1
2 - Minimal Understanding	7.69%	1
3 - Moderate Understanding	15.38%	2
4 - General Understanding	23.08%	3
5 - Full Understanding	46.15%	6
TOTAL		13

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

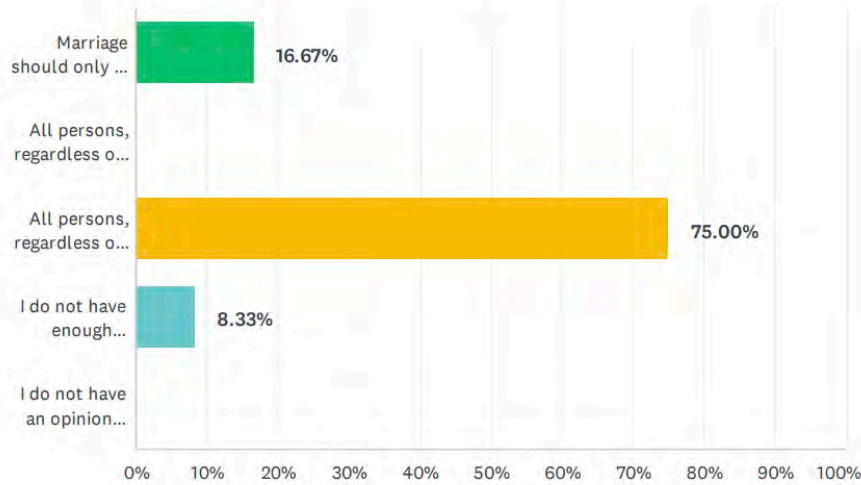
Answered: 12 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	8.33%	1
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	0.00%	0
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	75.00%	9
I do not have enough information to decide	8.33%	1
I do not have an opinion either way	8.33%	1
TOTAL		12

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 3

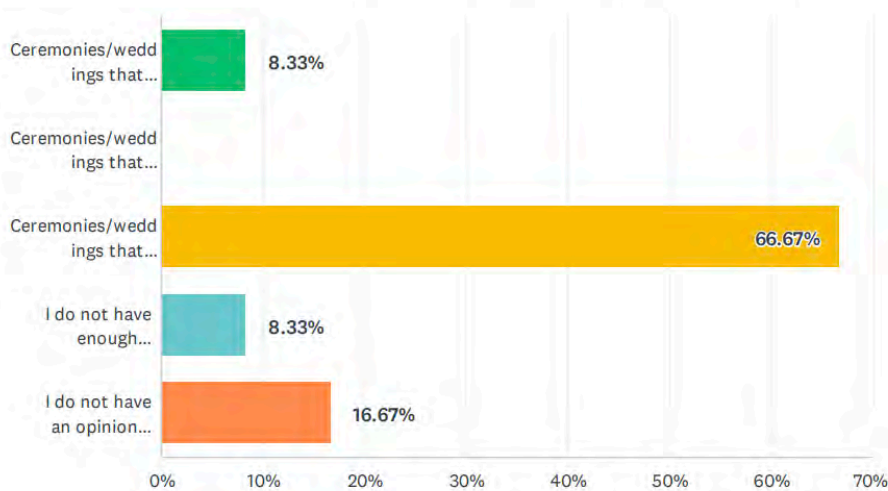


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	16.67% 2
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	0.00% 0
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	75.00% 9
I do not have enough information to decide	8.33% 1
I do not have an opinion either way	0.00% 0
TOTAL	12

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

Which of the following statements best describes your position?

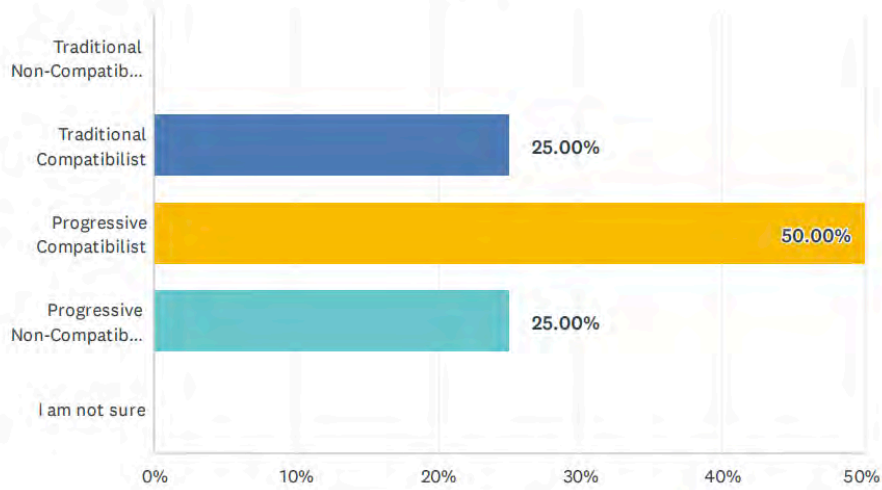
Answered: 12 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	8.33%	1
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	0.00%	0
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	66.67%	8
I do not have enough information to decide	8.33%	1
I do not have an opinion either way	16.67%	2
TOTAL		12

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 12 Skipped: 3

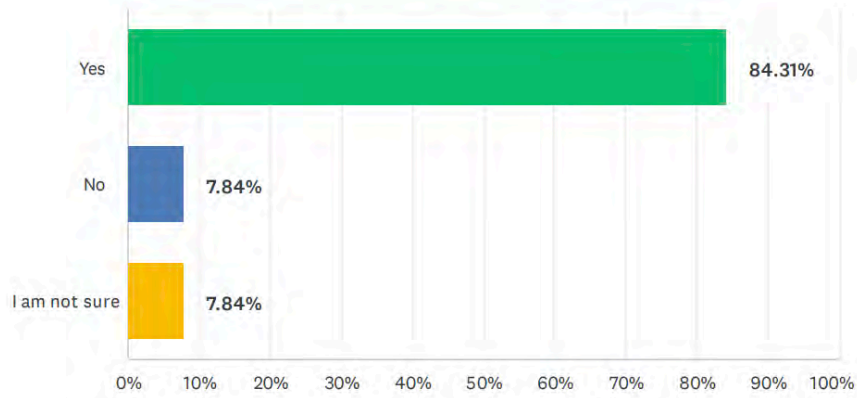


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	0.00%	0
Traditional Compatibilist	25.00%	3
Progressive Compatibilist	50.00%	6
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	25.00%	3
I am not sure	0.00%	0
TOTAL		12

Age Segmented: 18 – 30

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

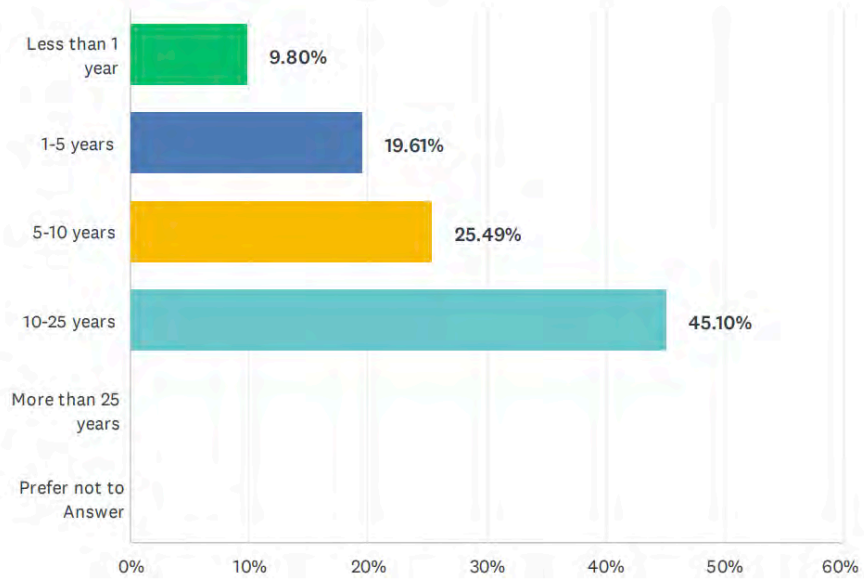
Answered: 51 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	84.31%	43
No	7.84%	4
I am not sure	7.84%	4
TOTAL		51

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

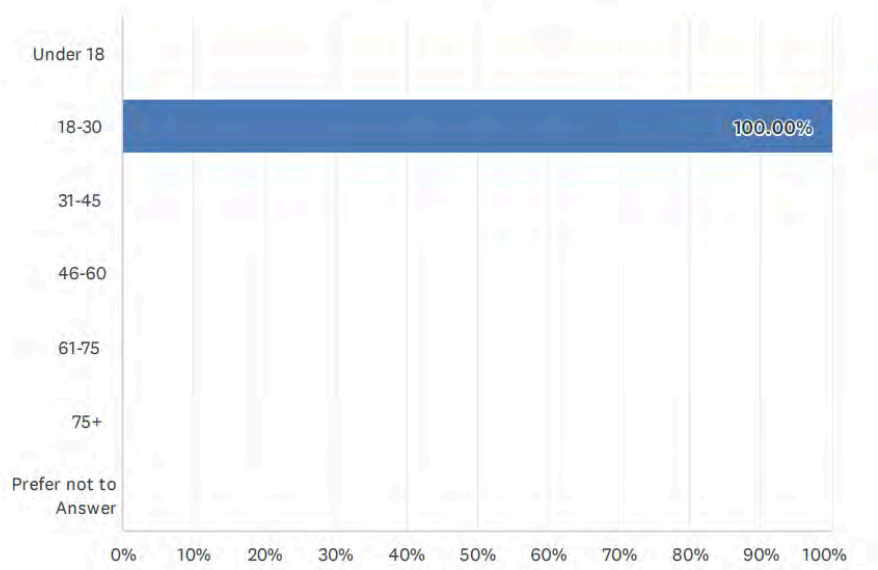
Answered: 51 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	9.80%	5
1-5 years	19.61%	10
5-10 years	25.49%	13
10-25 years	45.10%	23
More than 25 years	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		51

Q3 What is your age?

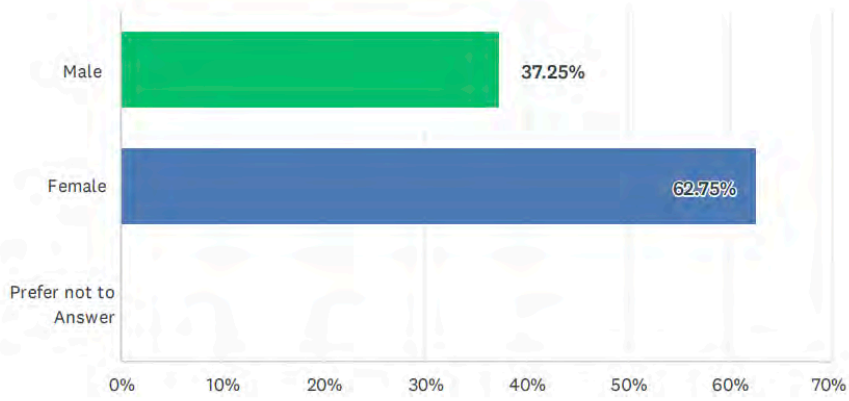
Answered: 51 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-30	100.00%	51
31-45	0.00%	0
46-60	0.00%	0
61-75	0.00%	0
75+	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		51

Q4 What is your gender?

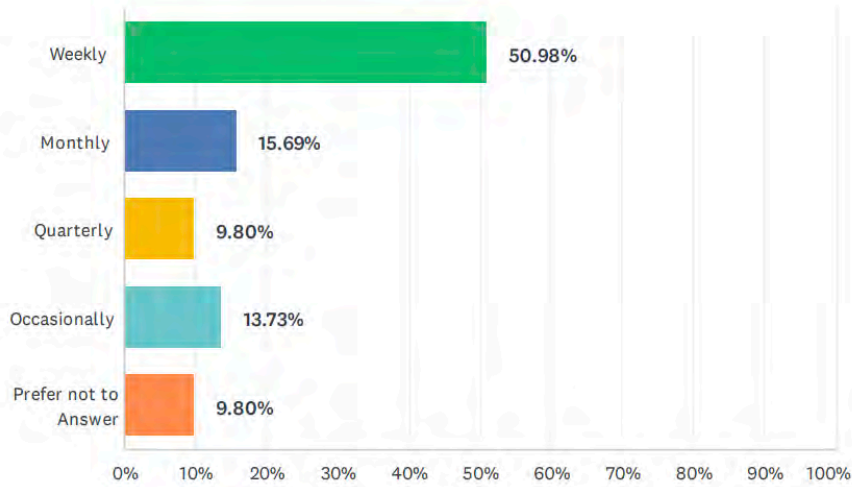
Answered: 51 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	37.25%	19
Female	62.75%	32
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		51

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

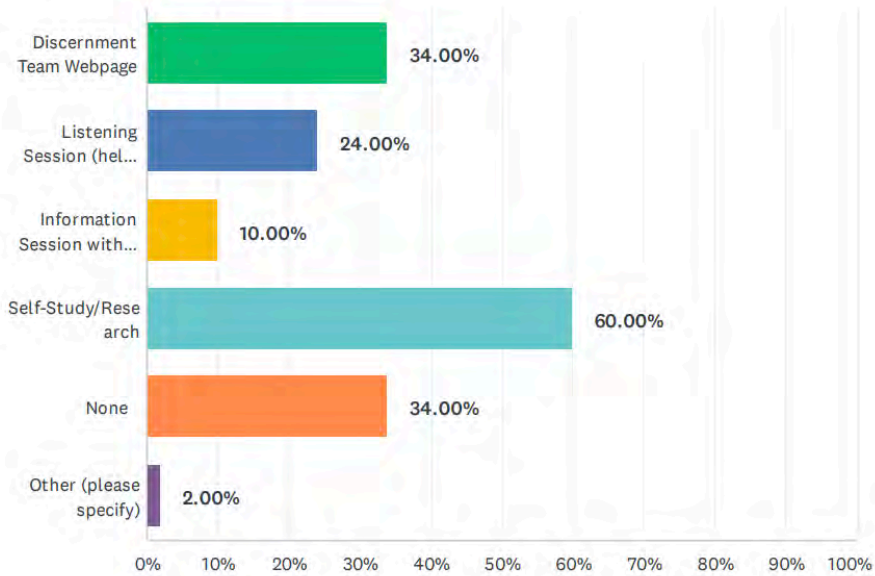
Answered: 51 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	50.98%	26
Monthly	15.69%	8
Quarterly	9.80%	5
Occasionally	13.73%	7
Prefer not to Answer	9.80%	5
TOTAL		51

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

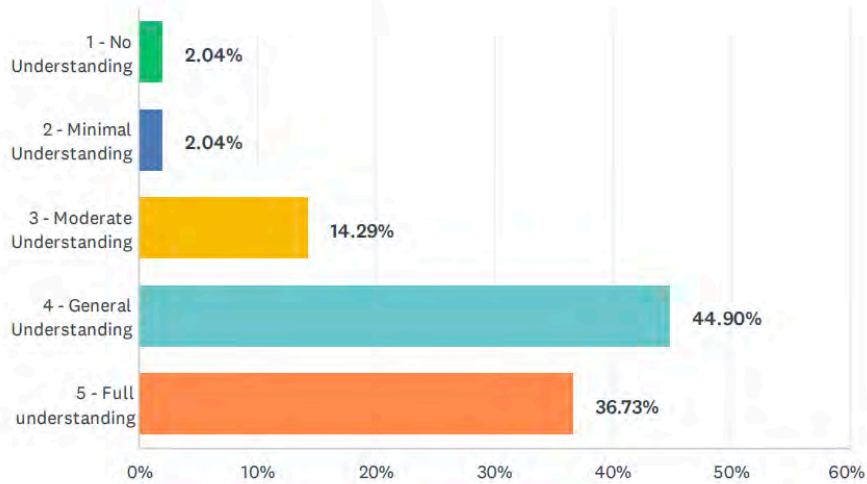
Answered: 50 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	34.00%	17
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	24.00%	12
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	10.00%	5
Self-Study/Research	60.00%	30
None	34.00%	17
Other (please specify)	2.00%	1
Total Respondents: 50		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

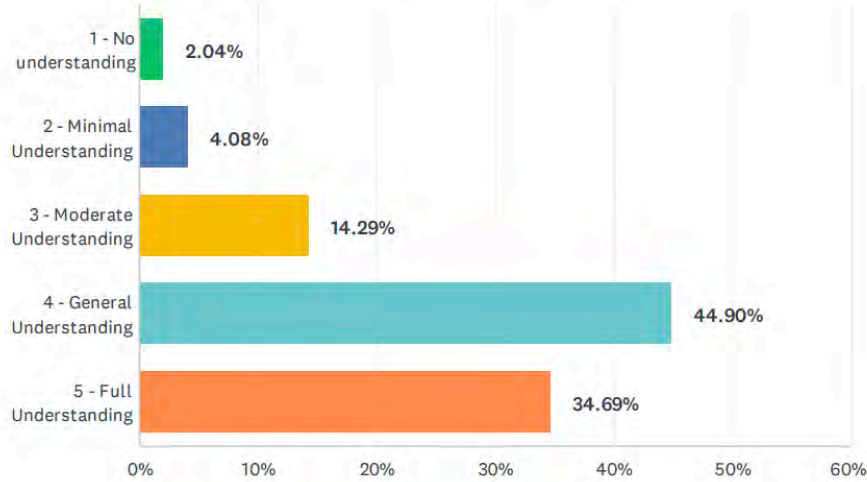
Answered: 49 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	2.04%	1
2 - Minimal Understanding	2.04%	1
3 - Moderate Understanding	14.29%	7
4 - General Understanding	44.90%	22
5 - Full understanding	36.73%	18
TOTAL		49

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

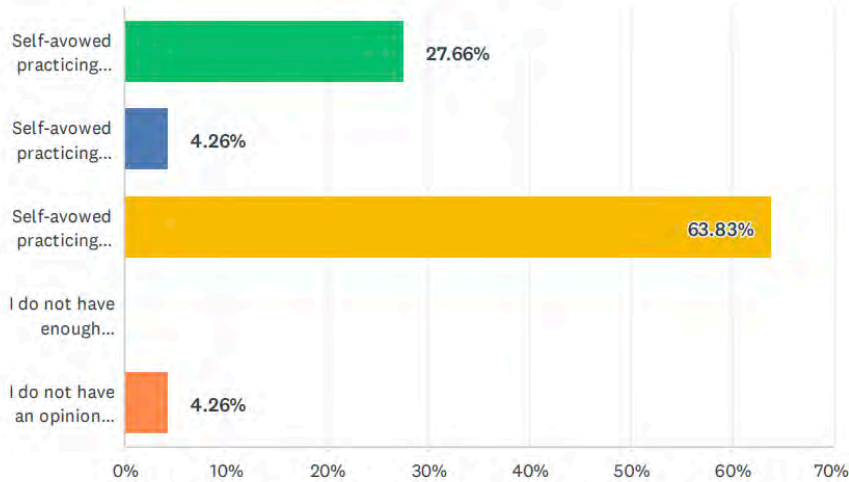
Answered: 49 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	2.04%	1
2 - Minimal Understanding	4.08%	2
3 - Moderate Understanding	14.29%	7
4 - General Understanding	44.90%	22
5 - Full Understanding	34.69%	17
TOTAL		49

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

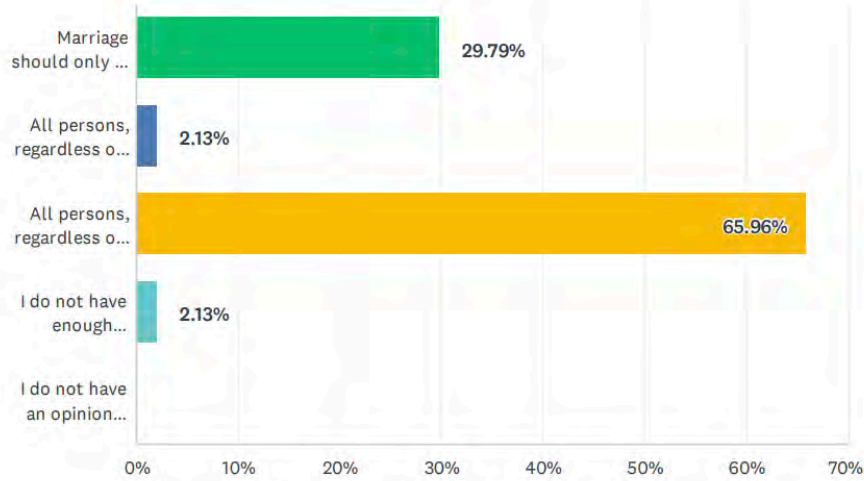
Answered: 47 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	27.66%	13
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	4.26%	2
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	63.83%	30
I do not have enough information to decide	0.00%	0
I do not have an opinion either way	4.26%	2
TOTAL		47

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

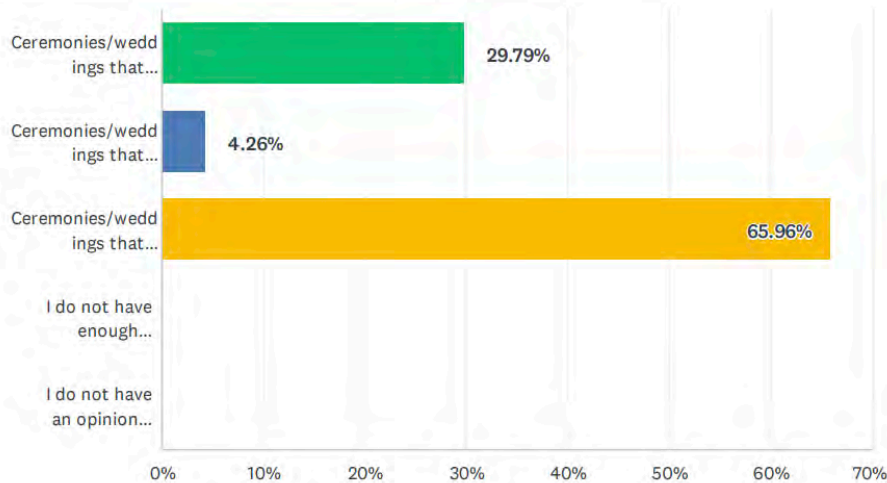
Answered: 47 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	29.79%	14
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	2.13%	1
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	65.96%	31
I do not have enough information to decide	2.13%	1
I do not have an opinion either way	0.00%	0
TOTAL		47

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."
Which of the following statements best describes your position?

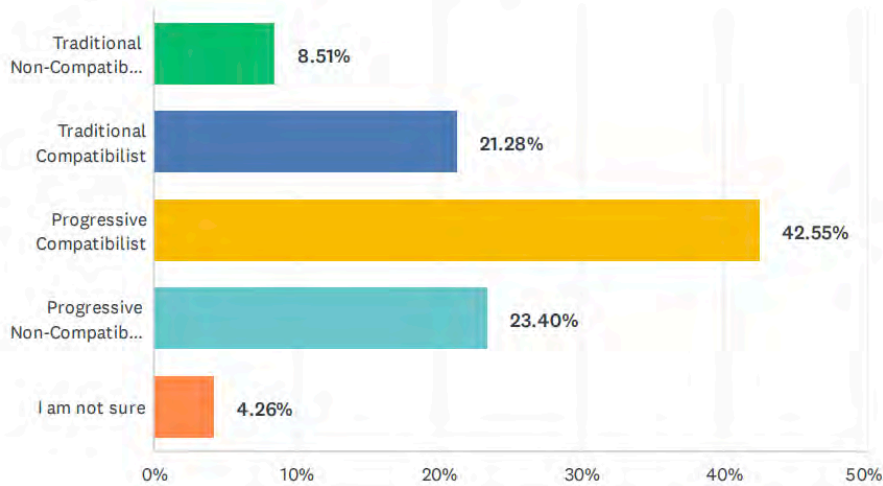
Answered: 47 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	29.79% 14
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	4.26% 2
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	65.96% 31
I do not have enough information to decide	0.00% 0
I do not have an opinion either way	0.00% 0
TOTAL	47

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 47 Skipped: 4

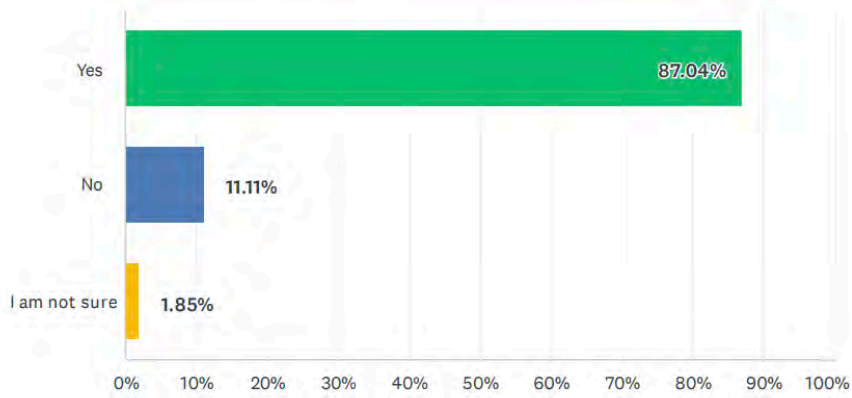


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	8.51%	4
Traditional Compatibilist	21.28%	10
Progressive Compatibilist	42.55%	20
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	23.40%	11
I am not sure	4.26%	2
TOTAL		47

Age Segmented: 31 – 45

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

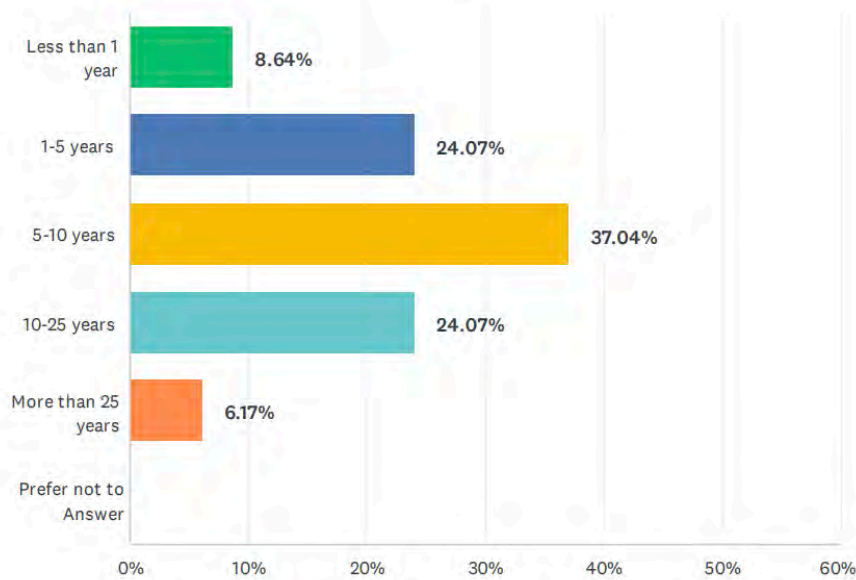
Answered: 162 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	87.04%	141
No	11.11%	18
I am not sure	1.85%	3
TOTAL		162

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

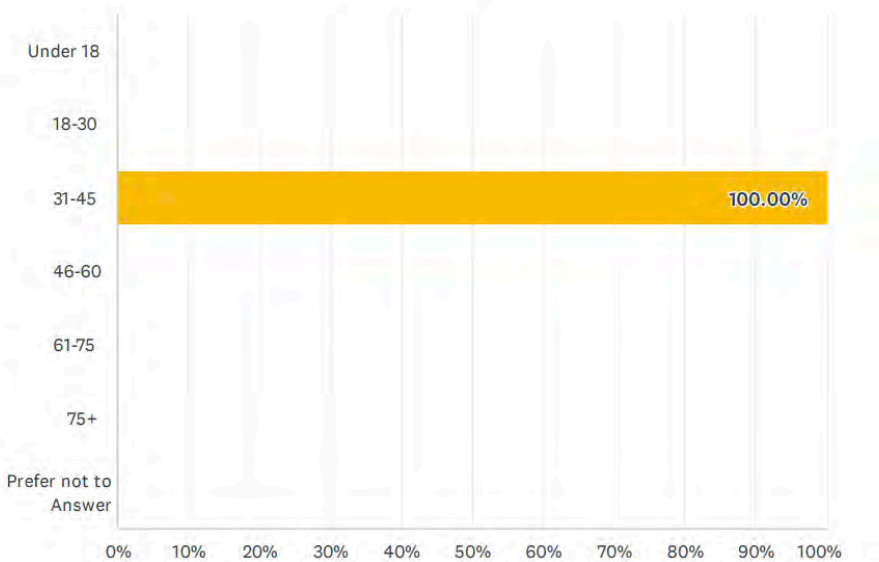
Answered: 162 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	8.64%	14
1-5 years	24.07%	39
5-10 years	37.04%	60
10-25 years	24.07%	39
More than 25 years	6.17%	10
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		162

Q3 What is your age?

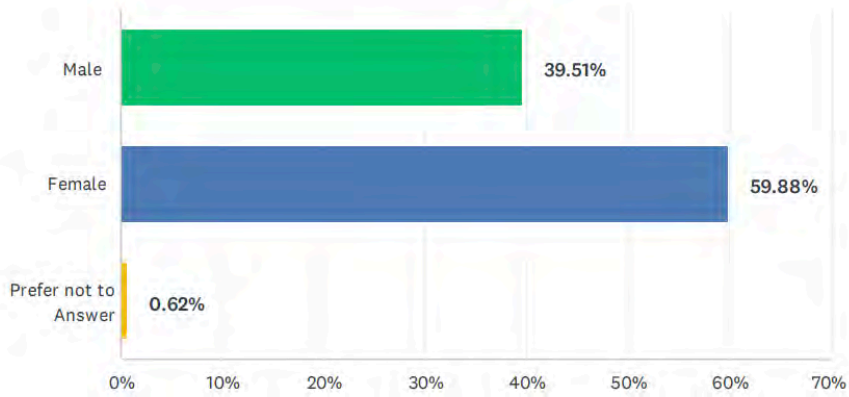
Answered: 162 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-30	0.00%	0
31-45	100.00%	162
46-60	0.00%	0
61-75	0.00%	0
75+	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		162

Q4 What is your gender?

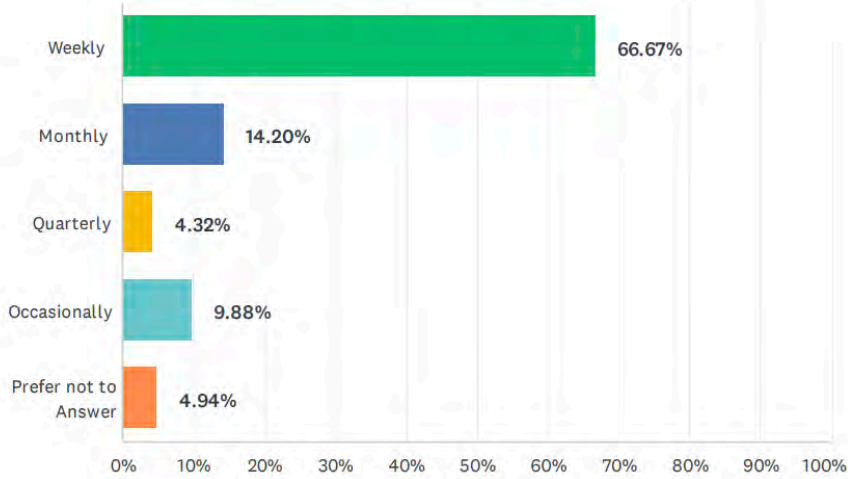
Answered: 162 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	39.51%	64
Female	59.88%	97
Prefer not to Answer	0.62%	1
TOTAL		162

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

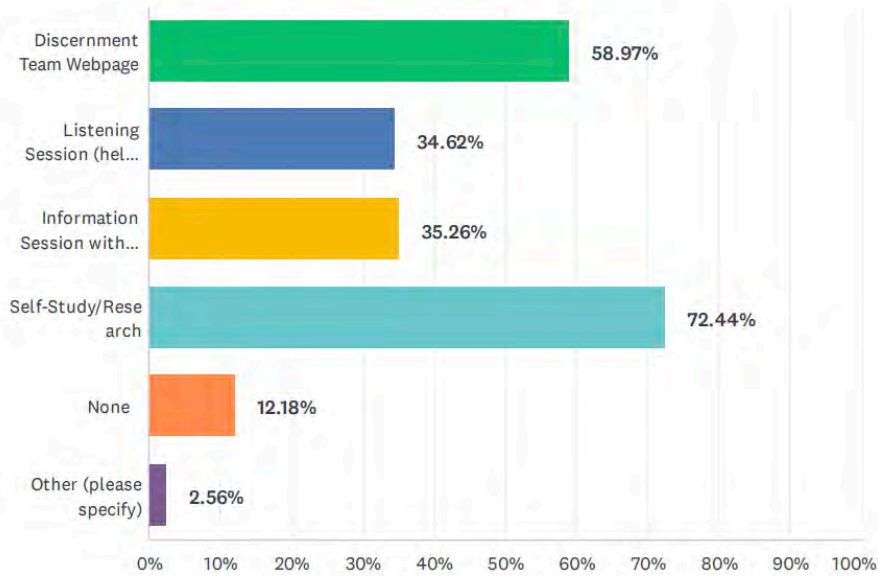
Answered: 162 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	66.67%	108
Monthly	14.20%	23
Quarterly	4.32%	7
Occasionally	9.88%	16
Prefer not to Answer	4.94%	8
TOTAL		162

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

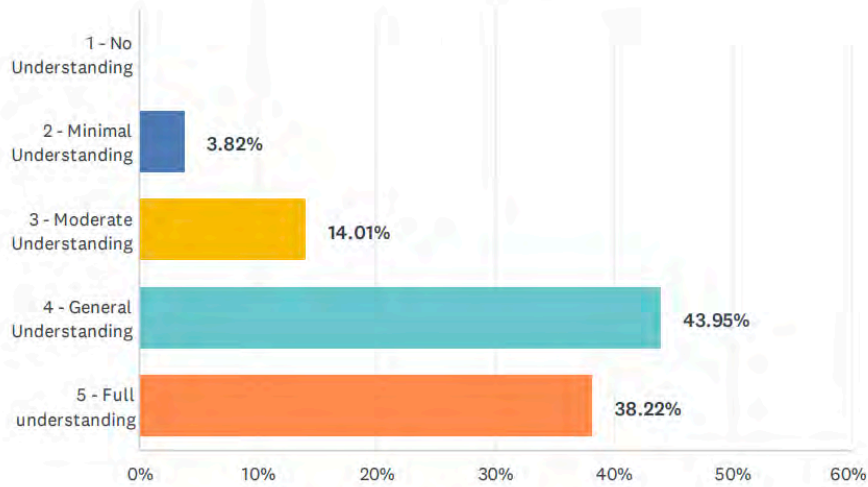
Answered: 156 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	58.97%	92
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	34.62%	54
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	35.26%	55
Self-Study/Research	72.44%	113
None	12.18%	19
Other (please specify)	2.56%	4
Total Respondents: 156		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

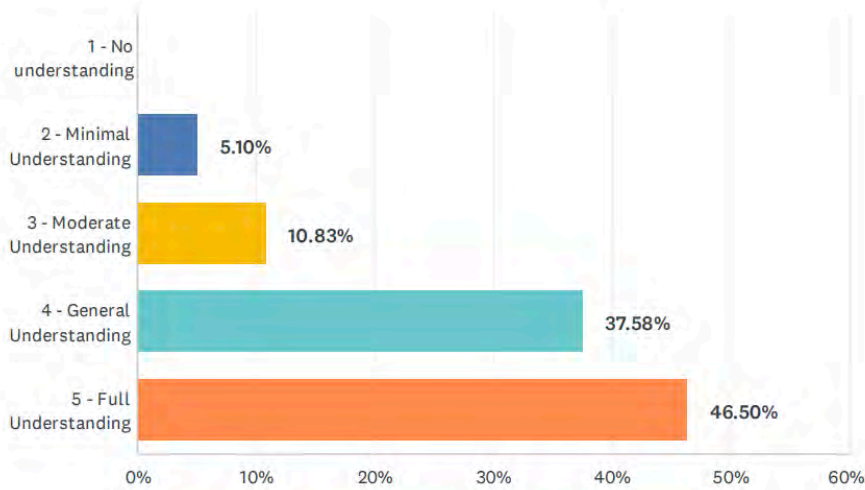
Answered: 157 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.00%	0
2 - Minimal Understanding	3.82%	6
3 - Moderate Understanding	14.01%	22
4 - General Understanding	43.95%	69
5 - Full understanding	38.22%	60
TOTAL		157

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

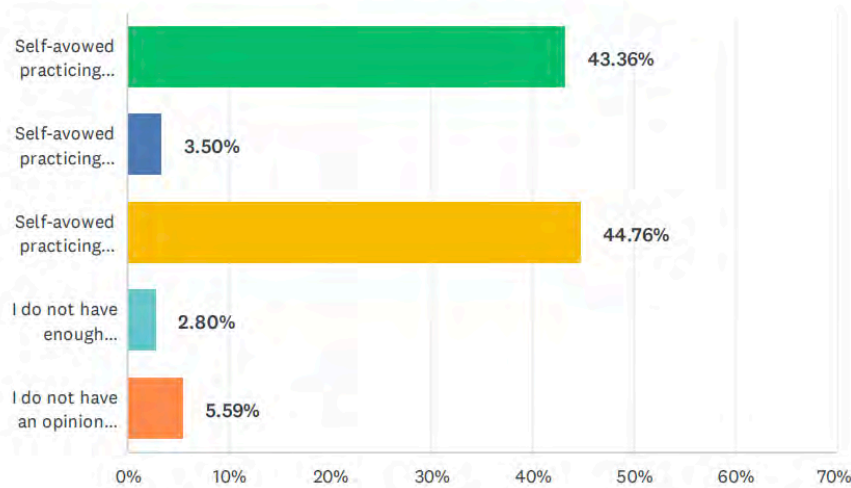
Answered: 157 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	0.00%	0
2 - Minimal Understanding	5.10%	8
3 - Moderate Understanding	10.83%	17
4 - General Understanding	37.58%	59
5 - Full Understanding	46.50%	73
TOTAL		157

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

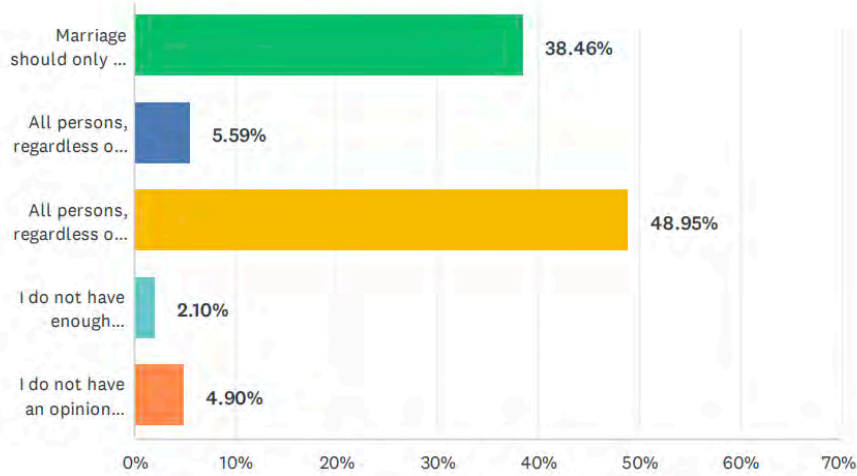
Answered: 143 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	43.36% 62
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	3.50% 5
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	44.76% 64
I do not have enough information to decide	2.80% 4
I do not have an opinion either way	5.59% 8
TOTAL	143

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

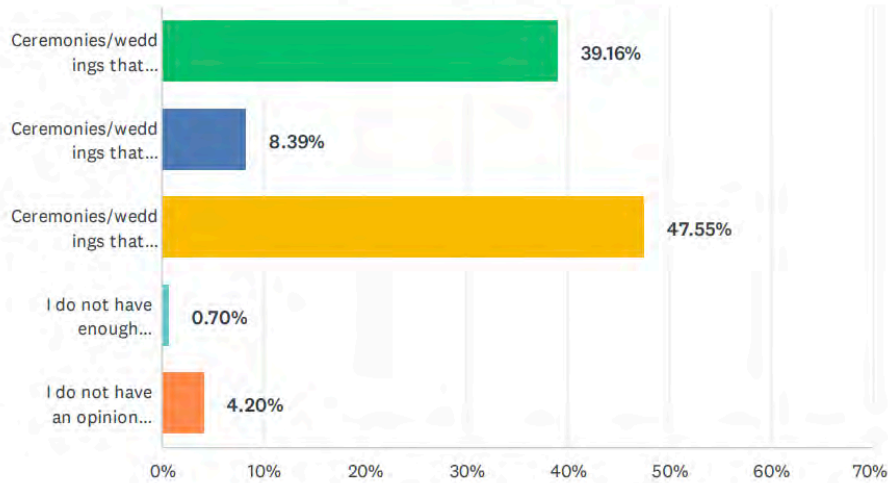
Answered: 143 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	38.46%	55
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	5.59%	8
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	48.95%	70
I do not have enough information to decide	2.10%	3
I do not have an opinion either way	4.90%	7
TOTAL		143

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."
Which of the following statements best describes your position?

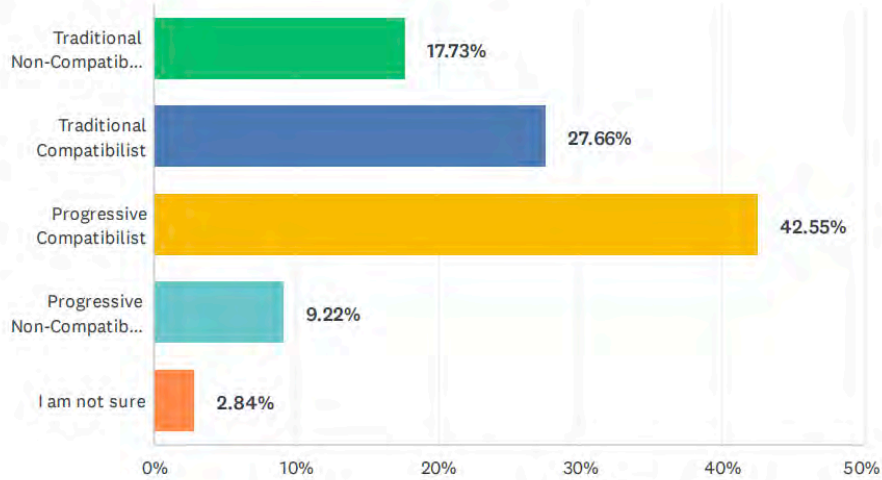
Answered: 143 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	39.16% 56
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	8.39% 12
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	47.55% 68
I do not have enough information to decide	0.70% 1
I do not have an opinion either way	4.20% 6
TOTAL	143

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 141 Skipped: 21

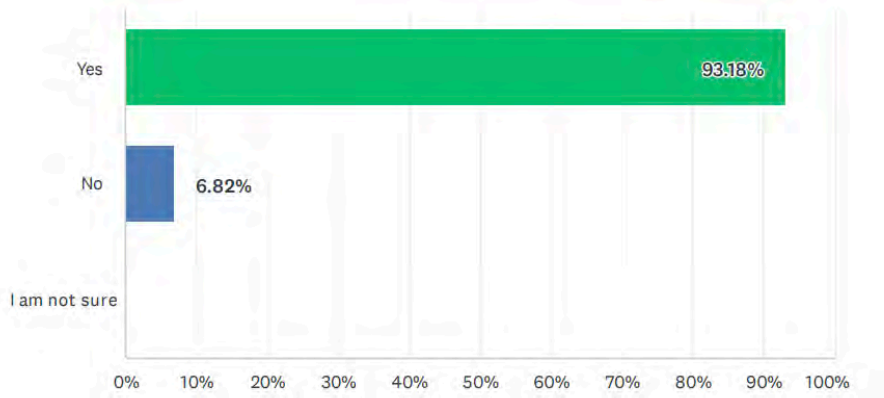


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	17.73%	25
Traditional Compatibilist	27.66%	39
Progressive Compatibilist	42.55%	60
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	9.22%	13
I am not sure	2.84%	4
TOTAL		141

Age Segmented: 46 – 60

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

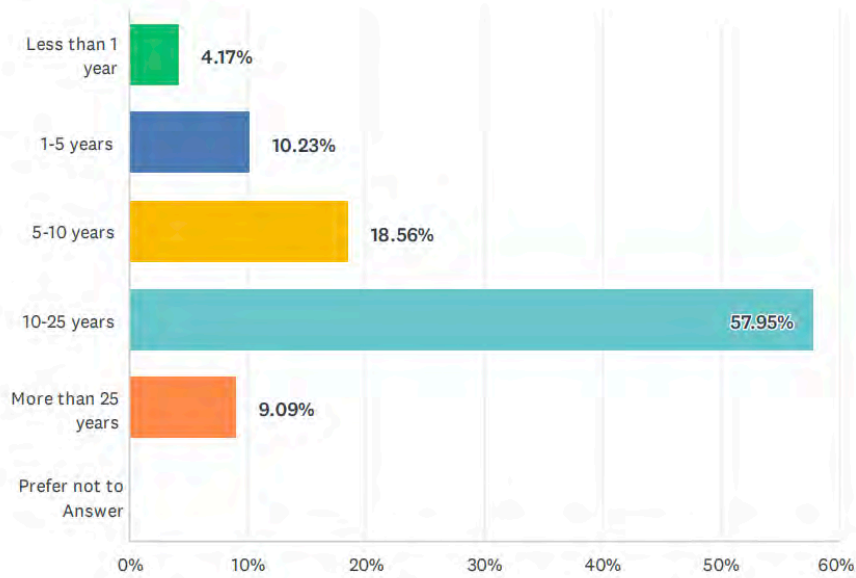
Answered: 264 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	93.18%	246
No	6.82%	18
I am not sure	0.00%	0
TOTAL		264

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

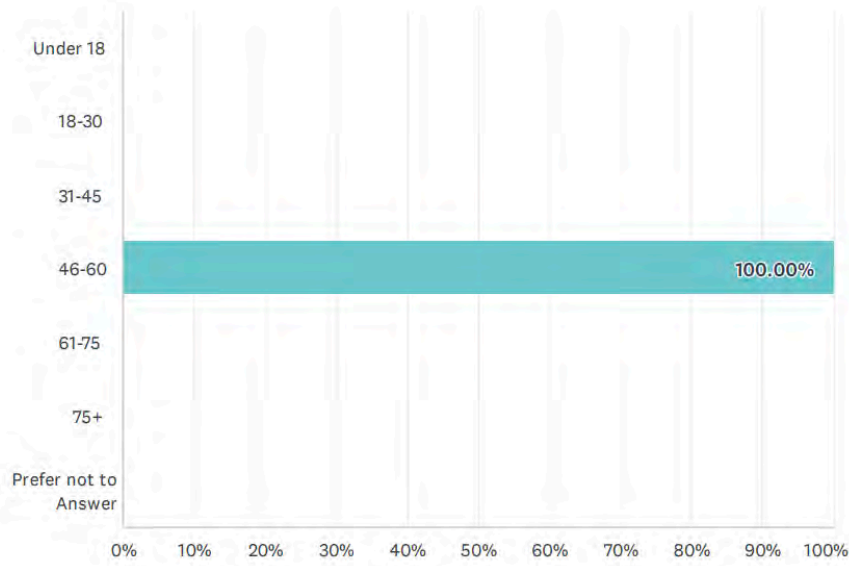
Answered: 264 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	4.17%	11
1-5 years	10.23%	27
5-10 years	18.56%	49
10-25 years	57.95%	153
More than 25 years	9.09%	24
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		264

Q3 What is your age?

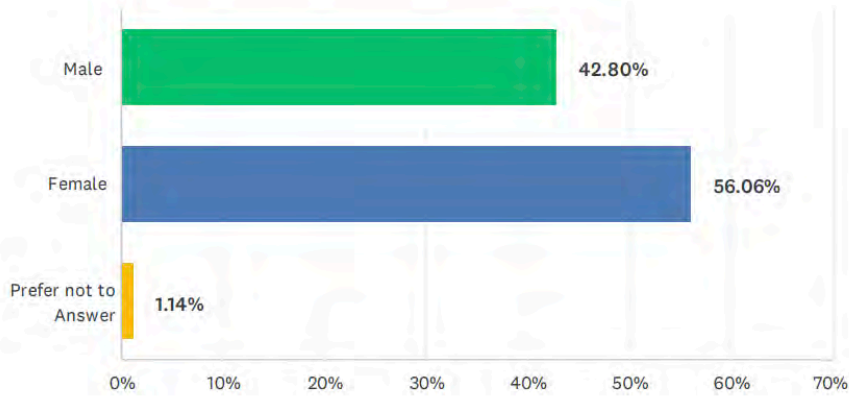
Answered: 264 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-30	0.00%	0
31-45	0.00%	0
46-60	100.00%	264
61-75	0.00%	0
75+	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		264

Q4 What is your gender?

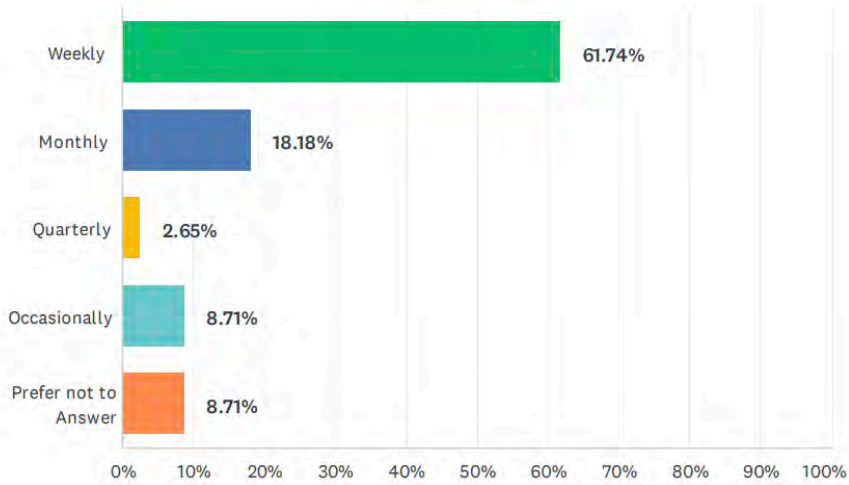
Answered: 264 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	42.80%	113
Female	56.06%	148
Prefer not to Answer	1.14%	3
TOTAL		264

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

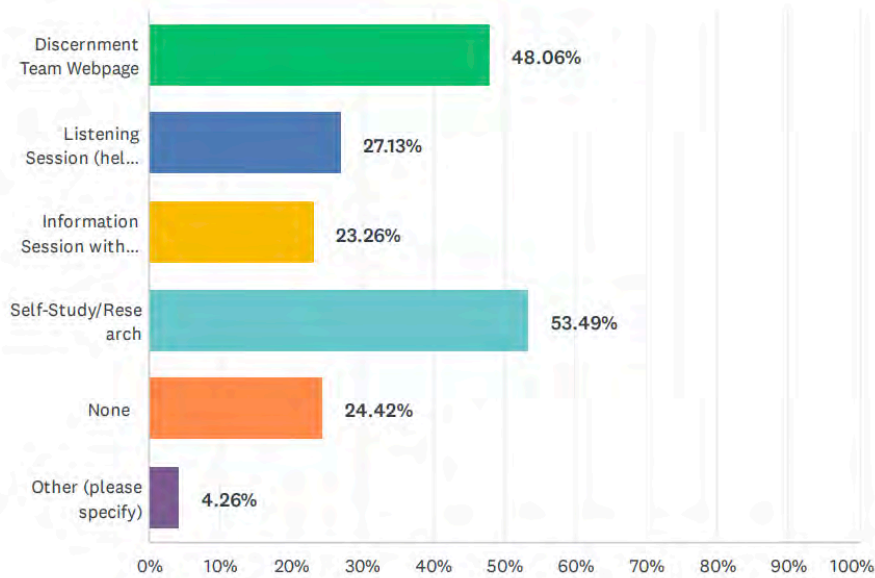
Answered: 264 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	61.74%	163
Monthly	18.18%	48
Quarterly	2.65%	7
Occasionally	8.71%	23
Prefer not to Answer	8.71%	23
TOTAL		264

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

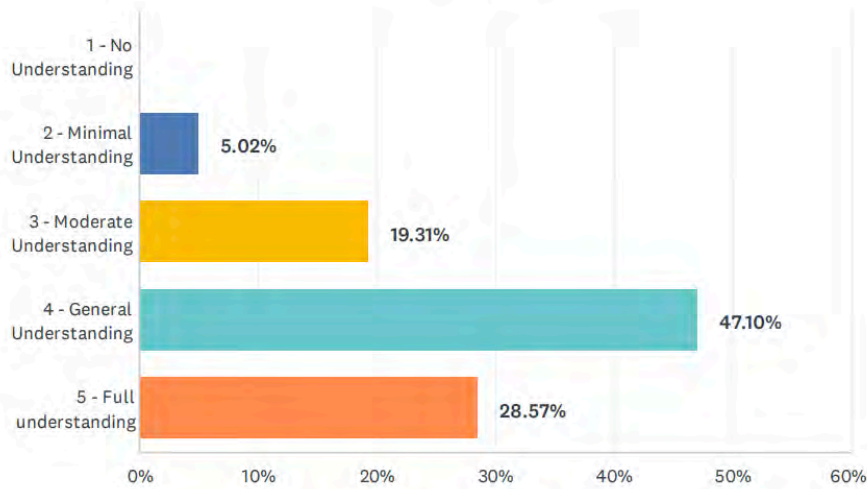
Answered: 258 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	48.06%	124
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	27.13%	70
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	23.26%	60
Self-Study/Research	53.49%	138
None	24.42%	63
Other (please specify)	4.26%	11
Total Respondents: 258		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

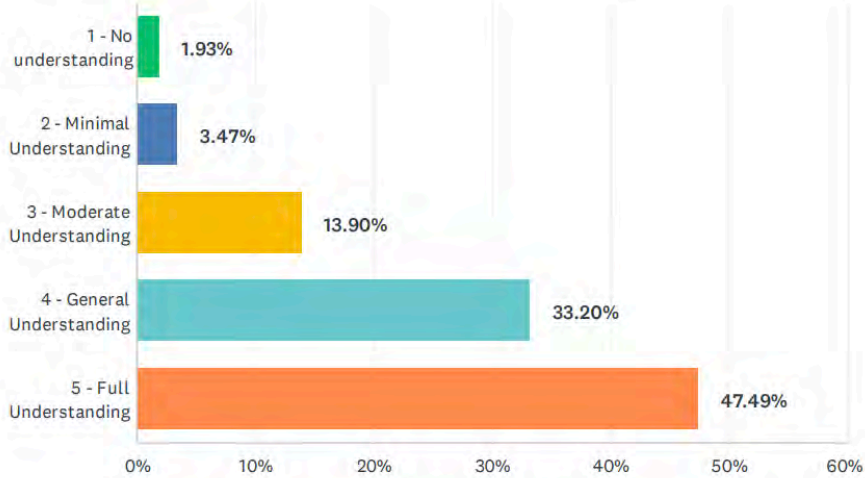
Answered: 259 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.00%	0
2 - Minimal Understanding	5.02%	13
3 - Moderate Understanding	19.31%	50
4 - General Understanding	47.10%	122
5 - Full understanding	28.57%	74
TOTAL		259

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

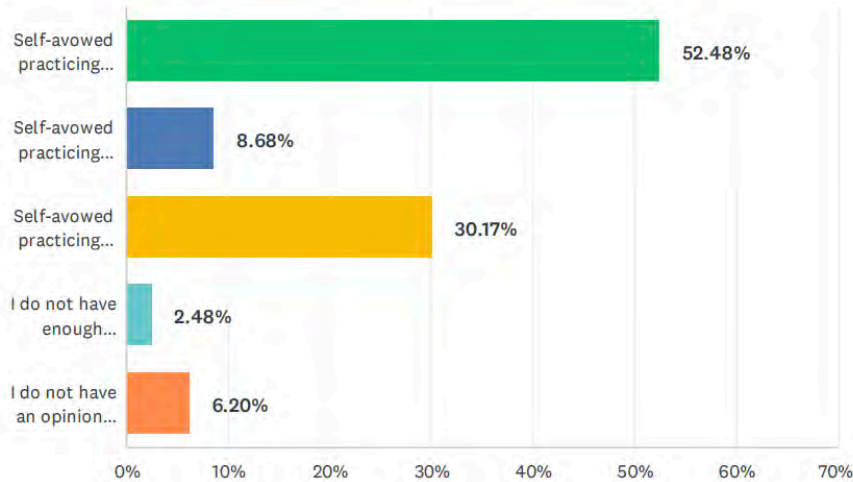
Answered: 259 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	1.93%	5
2 - Minimal Understanding	3.47%	9
3 - Moderate Understanding	13.90%	36
4 - General Understanding	33.20%	86
5 - Full Understanding	47.49%	123
TOTAL		259

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

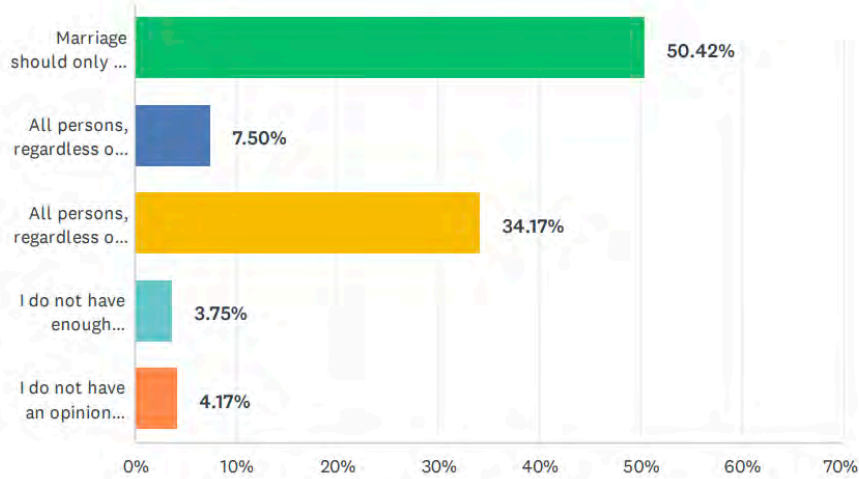
Answered: 242 Skipped: 22



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	52.48%	127
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	8.68%	21
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	30.17%	73
I do not have enough information to decide	2.48%	6
I do not have an opinion either way	6.20%	15
TOTAL		242

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

Answered: 240 Skipped: 24

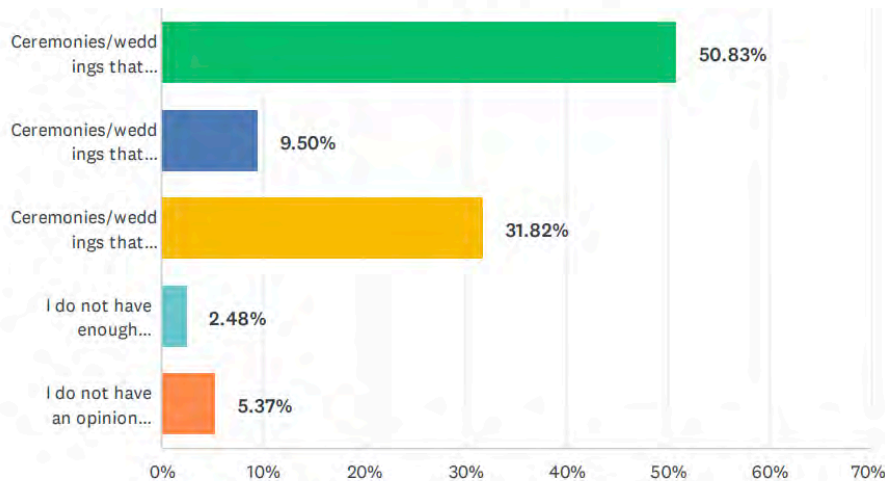


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	50.42% 121
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	7.50% 18
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	34.17% 82
I do not have enough information to decide	3.75% 9
I do not have an opinion either way	4.17% 10
TOTAL	240

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

Which of the following statements best describes your position?

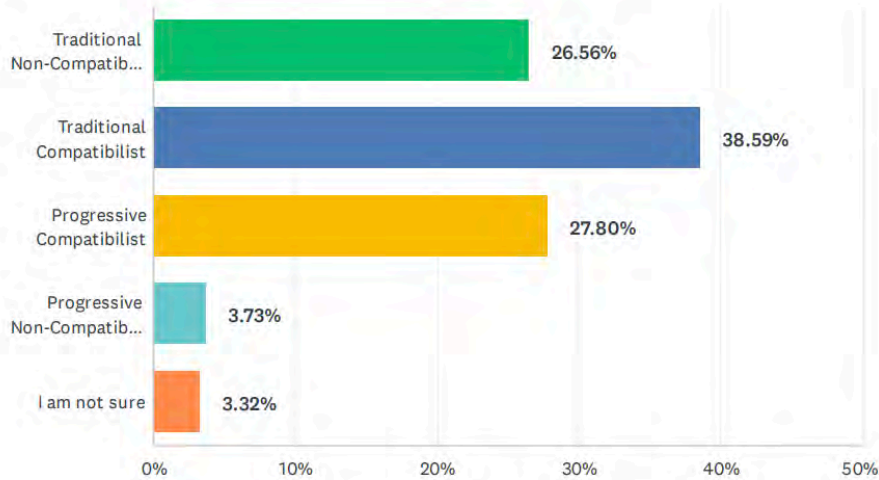
Answered: 242 Skipped: 22



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	50.83% 123
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	9.50% 23
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	31.82% 77
I do not have enough information to decide	2.48% 6
I do not have an opinion either way	5.37% 13
TOTAL	242

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 241 Skipped: 23

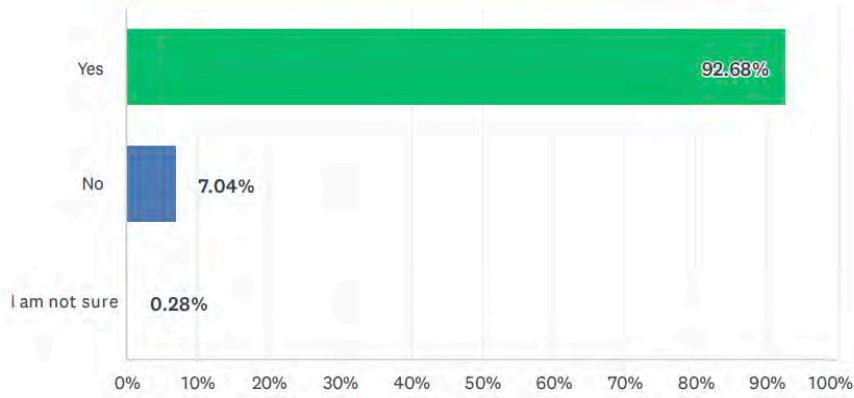


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	26.56%	64
Traditional Compatibilist	38.59%	93
Progressive Compatibilist	27.80%	67
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	3.73%	9
I am not sure	3.32%	8
TOTAL		241

Age Segmented: 61 – 75

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

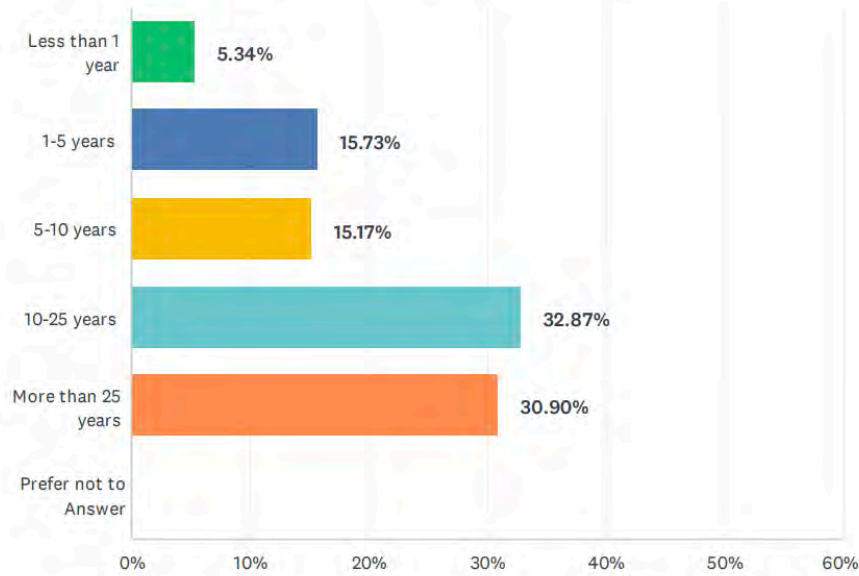
Answered: 355 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	92.68%	329
No	7.04%	25
I am not sure	0.28%	1
TOTAL		355

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

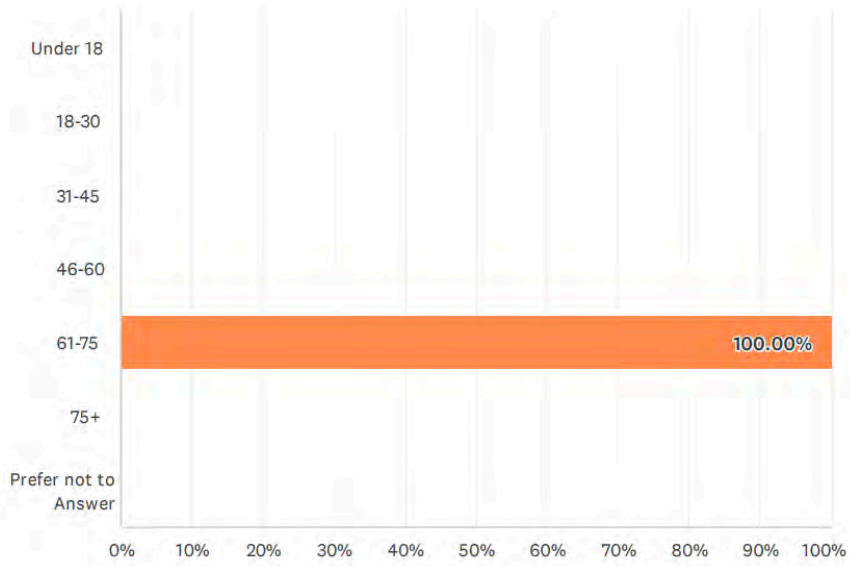
Answered: 356 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	5.34%	19
1-5 years	15.73%	56
5-10 years	15.17%	54
10-25 years	32.87%	117
More than 25 years	30.90%	110
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		356

Q3 What is your age?

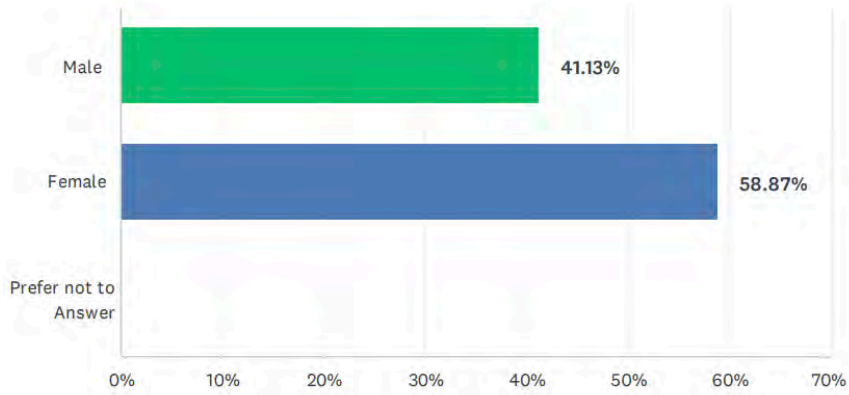
Answered: 356 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-30	0.00%	0
31-45	0.00%	0
46-60	0.00%	0
61-75	100.00%	356
75+	0.00%	0
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		356

Q4 What is your gender?

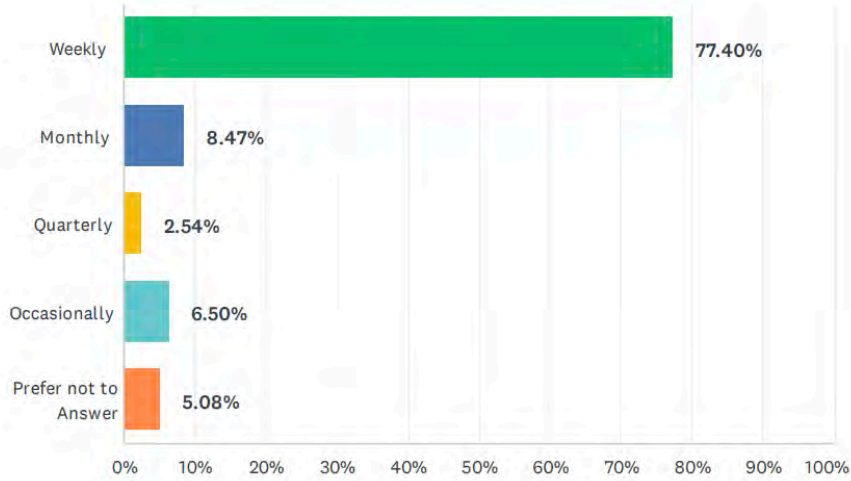
Answered: 355 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	41.13%	146
Female	58.87%	209
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		355

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

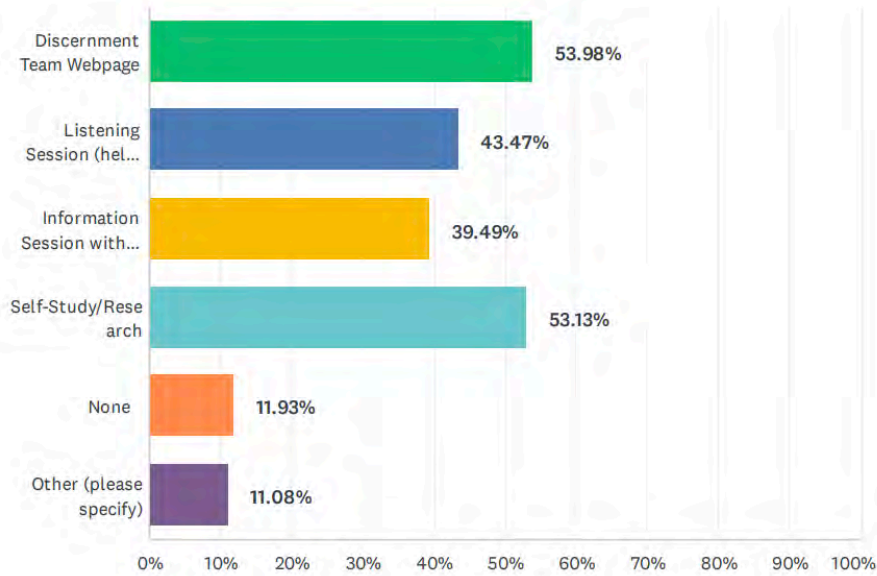
Answered: 354 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	77.40%	274
Monthly	8.47%	30
Quarterly	2.54%	9
Occasionally	6.50%	23
Prefer not to Answer	5.08%	18
TOTAL		354

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

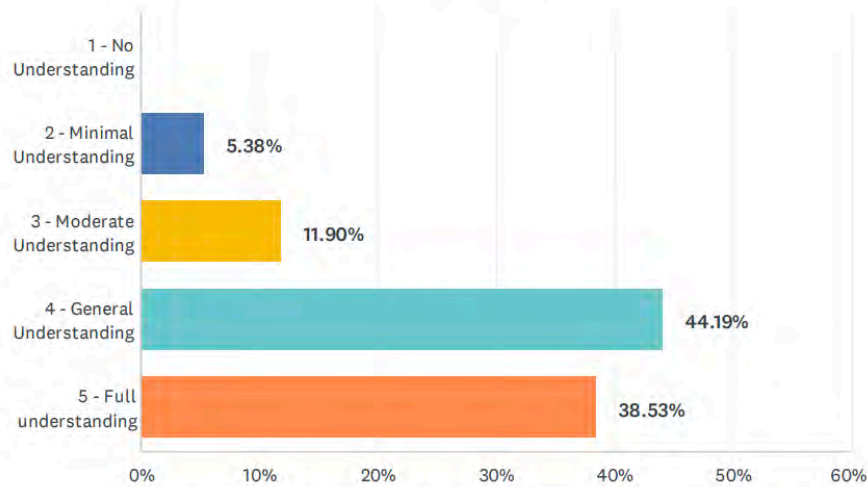
Answered: 352 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	53.98%	190
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	43.47%	153
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	39.49%	139
Self-Study/Research	53.13%	187
None	11.93%	42
Other (please specify)	11.08%	39
Total Respondents: 352		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

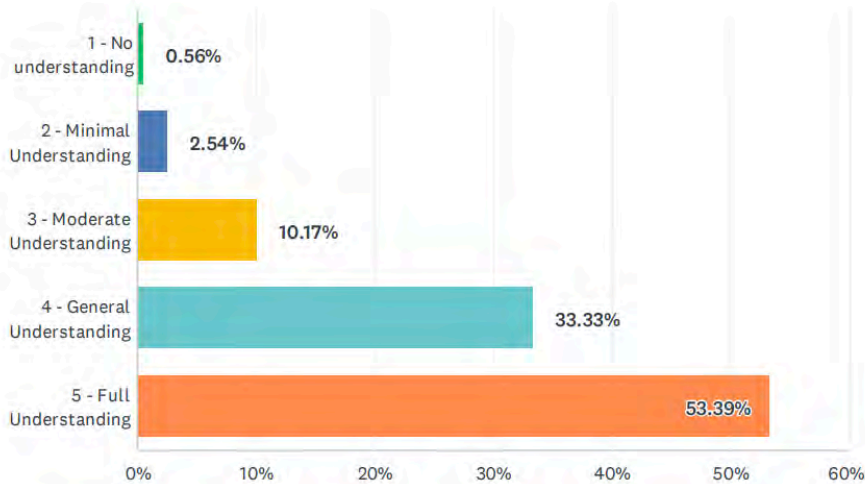
Answered: 353 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.00%	0
2 - Minimal Understanding	5.38%	19
3 - Moderate Understanding	11.90%	42
4 - General Understanding	44.19%	156
5 - Full understanding	38.53%	136
TOTAL		353

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

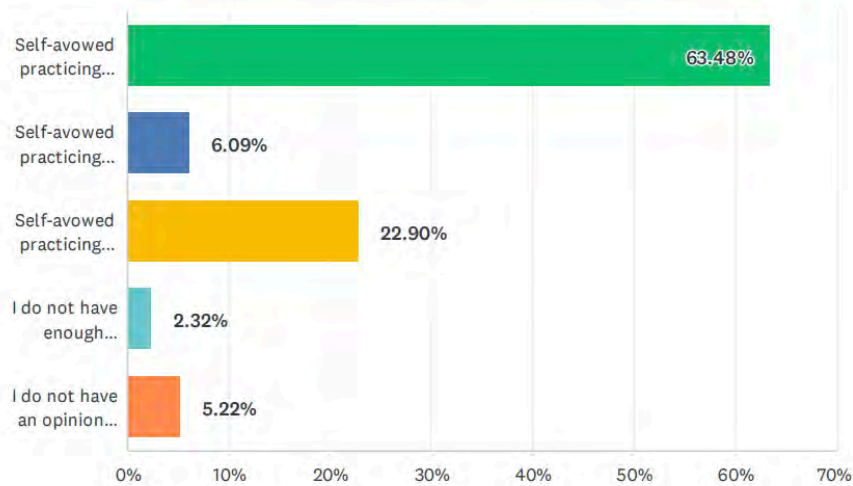
Answered: 354 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	0.56%	2
2 - Minimal Understanding	2.54%	9
3 - Moderate Understanding	10.17%	36
4 - General Understanding	33.33%	118
5 - Full Understanding	53.39%	189
TOTAL		354

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

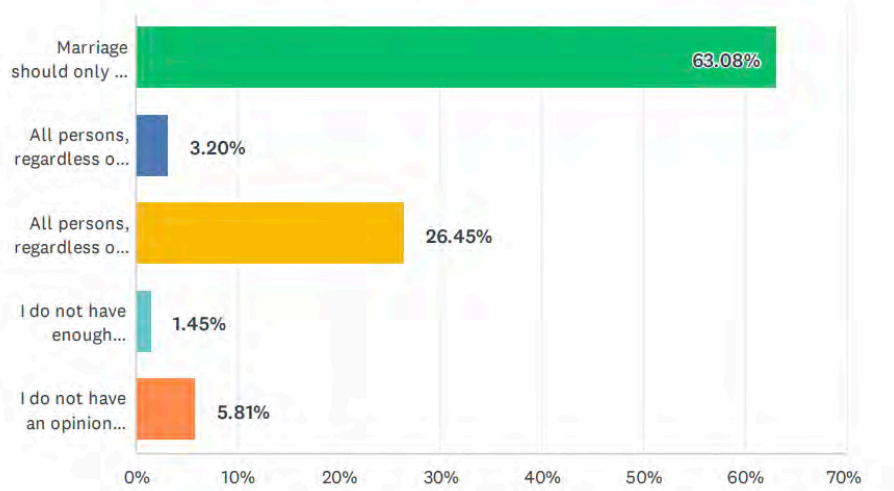
Answered: 345 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	63.48%	219
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	6.09%	21
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	22.90%	79
I do not have enough information to decide	2.32%	8
I do not have an opinion either way	5.22%	18
TOTAL		345

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

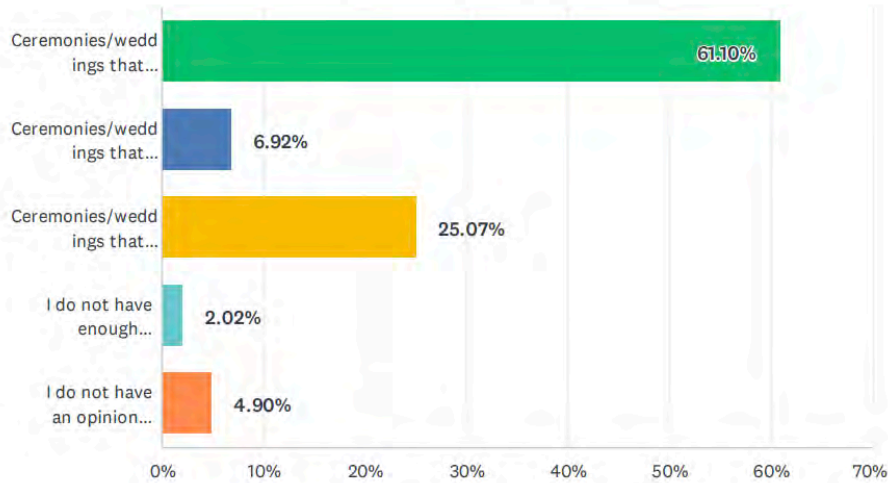
Answered: 344 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	63.08%	217
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	3.20%	11
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	26.45%	91
I do not have enough information to decide	1.45%	5
I do not have an opinion either way	5.81%	20
TOTAL		344

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."
Which of the following statements best describes your position?

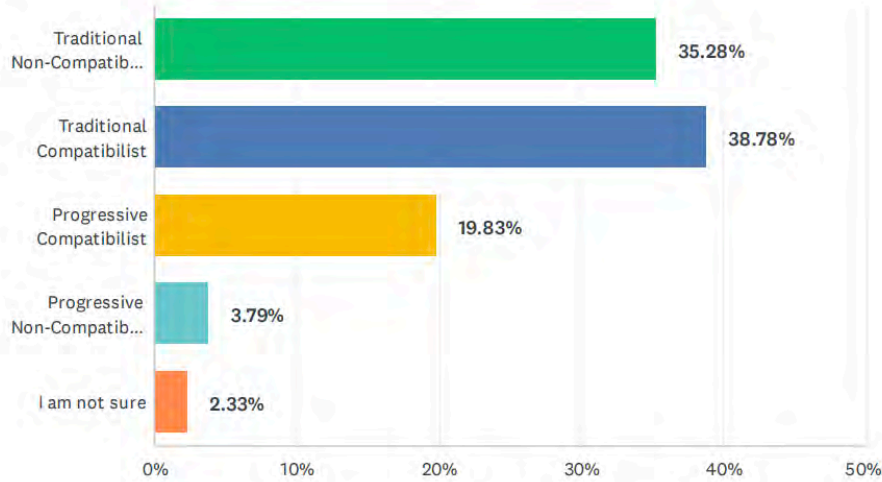
Answered: 347 Skipped: 9



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	61.10%	212
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	6.92%	24
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	25.07%	87
I do not have enough information to decide	2.02%	7
I do not have an opinion either way	4.90%	17
TOTAL		347

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 343 Skipped: 13

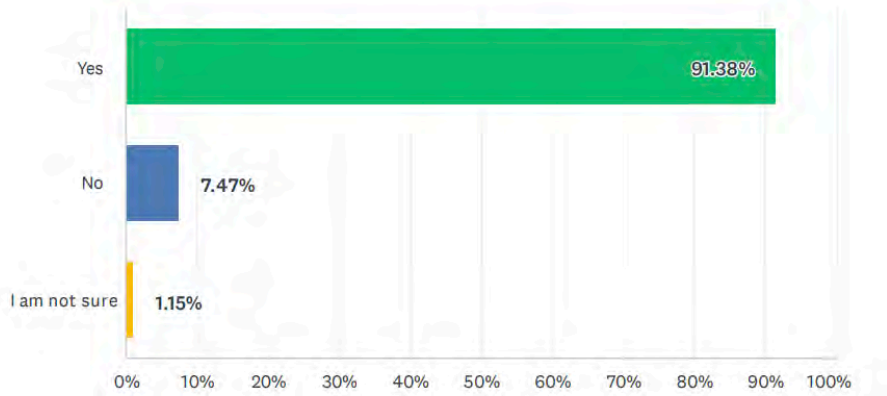


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	35.28%	121
Traditional Compatibilist	38.78%	133
Progressive Compatibilist	19.83%	68
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	3.79%	13
I am not sure	2.33%	8
TOTAL		343

Age Segmented: 75+

Q1 Are you a member of Asbury United Methodist Church?

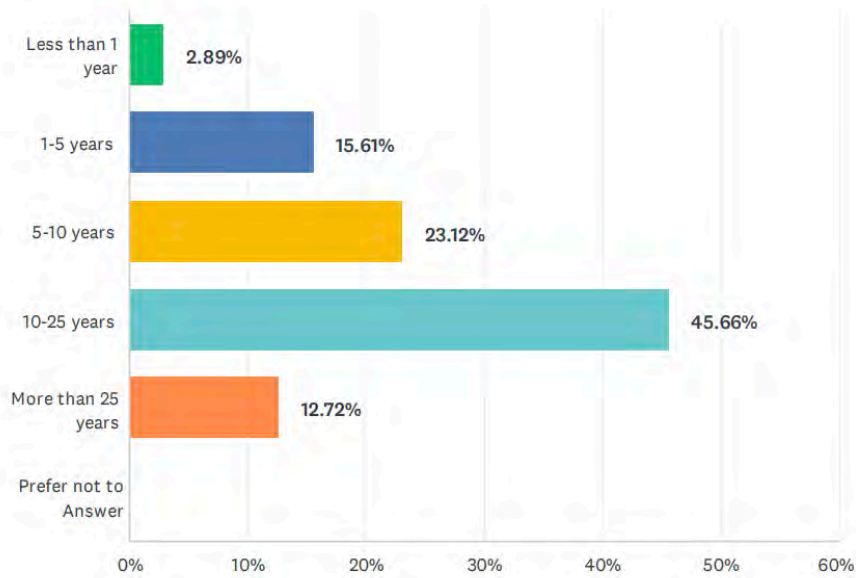
Answered: 174 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	91.38%	159
No	7.47%	13
I am not sure	1.15%	2
TOTAL		174

Q2 How long have you attended Asbury United Methodist Church?

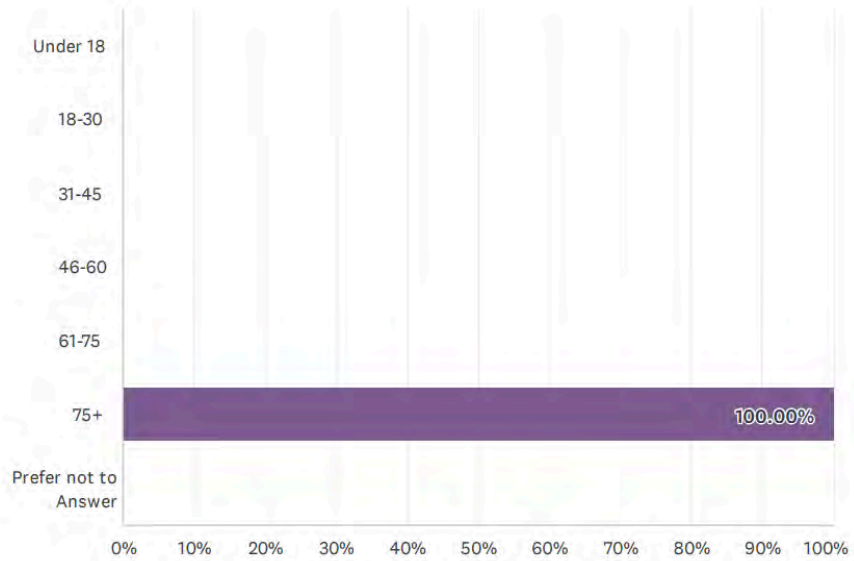
Answered: 173 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	2.89%	5
1-5 years	15.61%	27
5-10 years	23.12%	40
10-25 years	45.66%	79
More than 25 years	12.72%	22
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		173

Q3 What is your age?

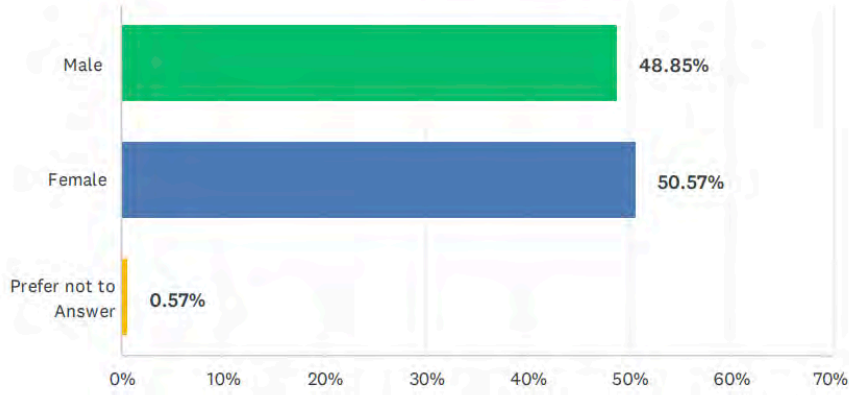
Answered: 174 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-30	0.00%	0
31-45	0.00%	0
46-60	0.00%	0
61-75	0.00%	0
75+	100.00%	174
Prefer not to Answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		174

Q4 What is your gender?

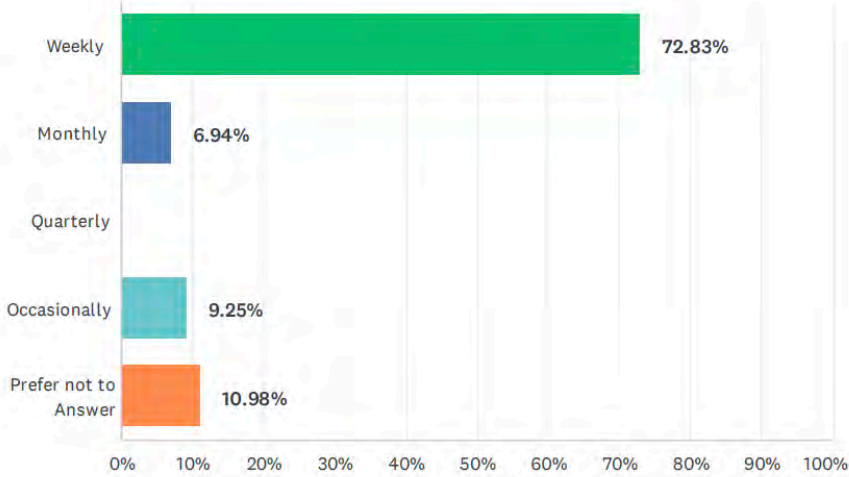
Answered: 174 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	48.85%	85
Female	50.57%	88
Prefer not to Answer	0.57%	1
TOTAL		174

Q5 What is the frequency of your attendance at any church-sponsored activity, such as Worship, Sunday School, Youth activities, Wednesday Night Dinner, Bible Studies, etc.?

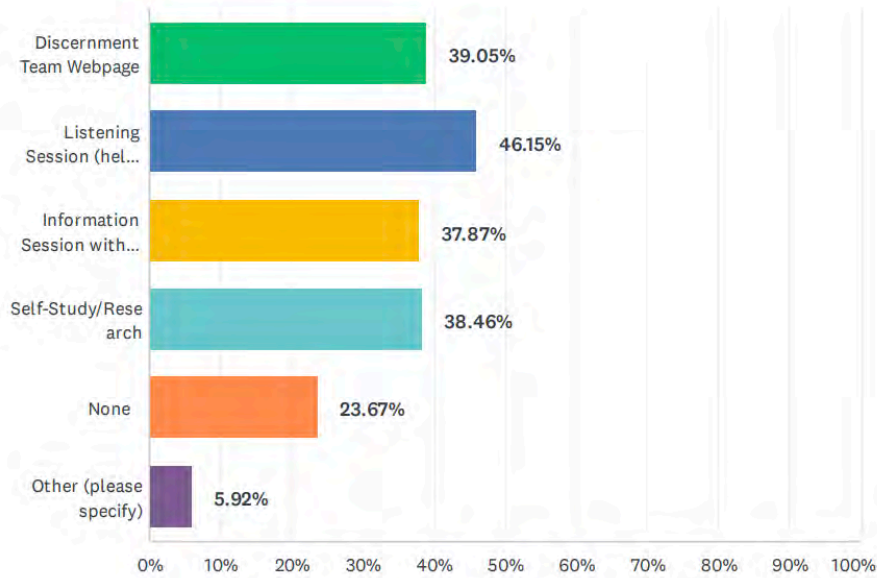
Answered: 173 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	72.83%	126
Monthly	6.94%	12
Quarterly	0.00%	0
Occasionally	9.25%	16
Prefer not to Answer	10.98%	19
TOTAL		173

Q6 Did you access or attend any of the following? (check all that apply)

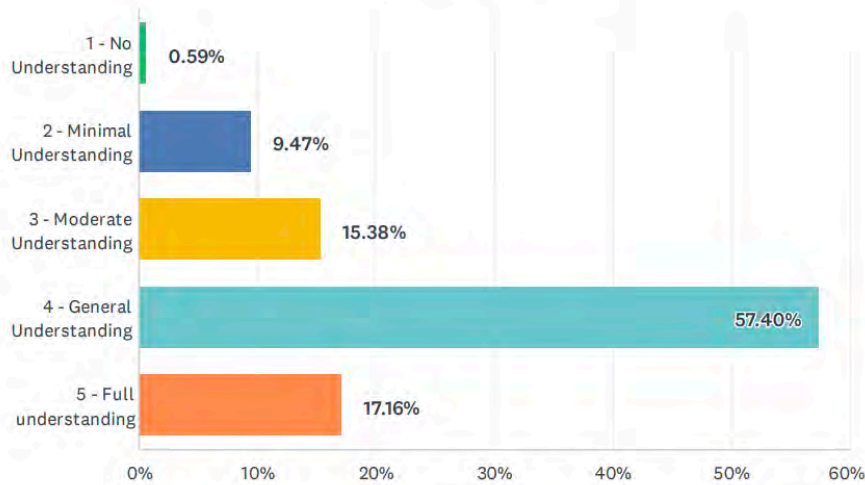
Answered: 169 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Discernment Team Webpage	39.05%	66
Listening Session (held in Fall 2022)	46.15%	78
Information Session with Pastor Mike (held in November 2022)	37.87%	64
Self-Study/Research	38.46%	65
None	23.67%	40
Other (please specify)	5.92%	10
Total Respondents: 169		

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the current issues around church governance as it relates to human sexuality within the United Methodist denomination?

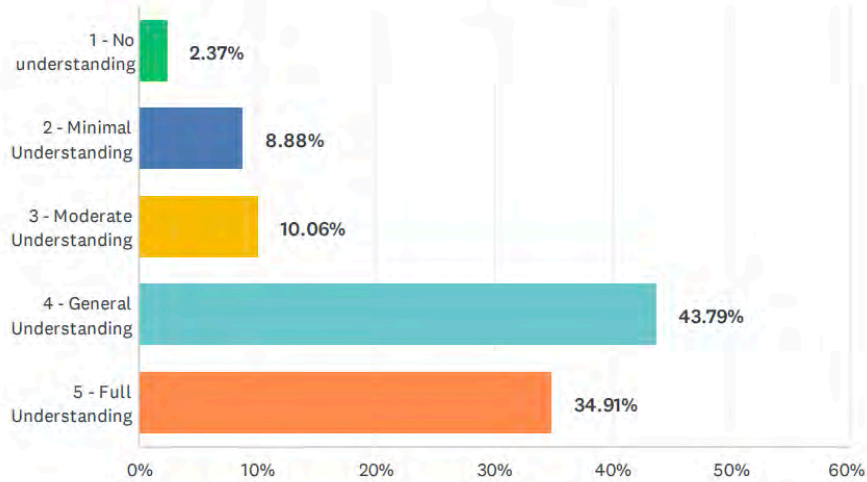
Answered: 169 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No Understanding	0.59%	1
2 - Minimal Understanding	9.47%	16
3 - Moderate Understanding	15.38%	26
4 - General Understanding	57.40%	97
5 - Full understanding	17.16%	29
TOTAL		169

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you feel you understand the reason why Asbury United Methodist Church is in a discernment process?

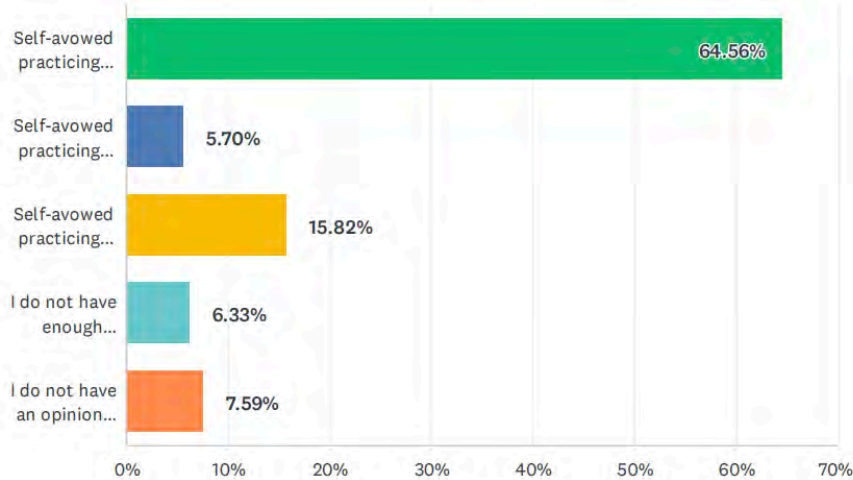
Answered: 169 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - No understanding	2.37%	4
2 - Minimal Understanding	8.88%	15
3 - Moderate Understanding	10.06%	17
4 - General Understanding	43.79%	74
5 - Full Understanding	34.91%	59
TOTAL		169

Q10 Paragraph 304.3 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Which of the following statements best describes your position?

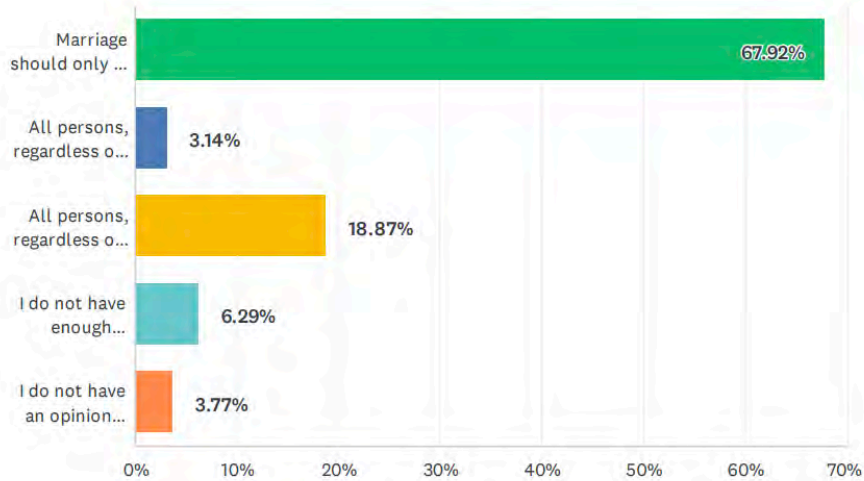
Answered: 158 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to be ministers	64.56%	102
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	5.70%	9
Self-avowed practicing homosexuals should be allowed to be ministers	15.82%	25
I do not have enough information to decide	6.33%	10
I do not have an opinion either way	7.59%	12
TOTAL		158

Q11 Paragraph 161.C of the United Methodist Book of Discipline defines marriage, "as the union of one man and one woman." Which of the following best describes your position?

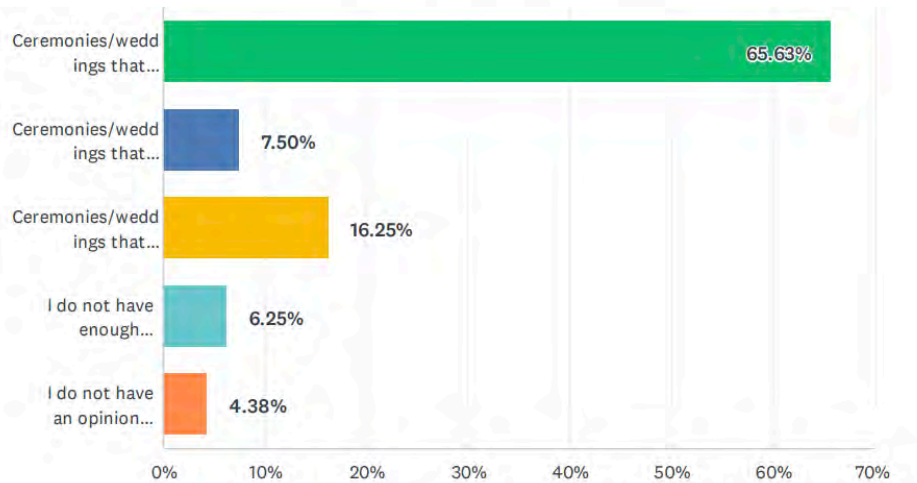
Answered: 159 Skipped: 15



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	67.92%	108
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in the United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	3.14%	5
All persons, regardless of sexual orientation should be allowed to be married in any United Methodist Church	18.87%	30
I do not have enough information to decide	6.29%	10
I do not have an opinion either way	3.77%	6
TOTAL		159

Q12 Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline states "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions [weddings] shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."
Which of the following statements best describes your position?

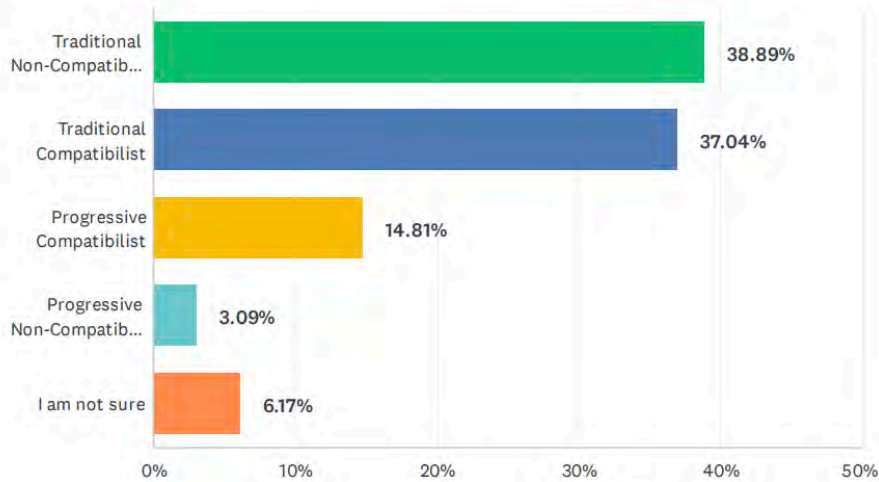
Answered: 160 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should not be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should not be conducted in any United Methodist Church	65.63% 105
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions could be conducted by United Methodist ministers and could be conducted in a United Methodist Church, but not at Asbury United Methodist Church	7.50% 12
Ceremonies/weddings that celebrate homosexual unions should be conducted by United Methodist ministers and should be conducted in any United Methodist Church	16.25% 26
I do not have enough information to decide	6.25% 10
I do not have an opinion either way	4.38% 7
TOTAL	160

Q13 Choose the single category that comes the closest to describing your priorities and position in the United Methodist Church.

Answered: 162 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traditional Non-Compatibilist	38.89%	63
Traditional Compatibilist	37.04%	60
Progressive Compatibilist	14.81%	24
Progressive Non-Compatibilist	3.09%	5
I am not sure	6.17%	10
TOTAL		162

Appendix D: Open Ended Question Response Analysis

Qualitative analysis of open-ended question responses from questions 9, 14, 15, and 16 performed by an independent third-party analyst from the University of Michigan in conjunction with the Discernment Team. Individual responses to questions 9, 14, 15, and 16 are not provided as participants were informed that all reporting would be conducted in the aggregate and responses would remain confidential. The Discernment Team has reviewed all comments in detail and provides this overview to provide additional context to the survey report.

Q9: Additional Information Requests

Question 9 asked, “What additional information or resources would you like to see provided by the Discernment Team to the congregation?” 159 individuals made a comment or requested additional information in responses to this question. Questions will not be answered in this report but will be addressed in a different method to most effectively communicate with the congregation as a whole.

Responses were sorted into general categories depending on the question/comment content, but not based on the stance of the respondent or opinions expressed in the question.

Request for Full Transparency around Asbury’s Discernment Process

24 responses directly called for transparency regarding the discernment process as a whole or regarding a specific aspect of the process. One respondent said, “I just want them [Discernment Team] to be very transparent with their report to the congregation after this survey. Regardless of what they decide (vote or no vote) they need to provide ample data to the congregation to explain WHY they chose that option.” Another stated, “Truthful information, presented in the spirit of transparency, in the attachments sent out.” Other commenters expressed concerns about a perceived lack of transparency during the process stating, “more transparency. Being more upfront about this whole situation. Having read what other Methodist churches have given their members, I feel like Asbury has stayed on the down low.”

United Methodist Church History and Polity around Human Sexuality

15 responses directly expressed a desire to know more about the official stance of the United Methodist Church on human sexuality. Questions asked were general in some instances, such as, “What is the position of the United Methodist Church concerning all aspects of human sexuality?” and “What is the stated position of The UMC on homosexuality... I don’t understand why Churches are leaving. It seems they are leaving because of liberal leanings of the UMC but the doctrines stated do not support that belief. What am I missing?” Other respondents asked more specific questions relating to polity and disaffiliation – “I’d like to see more discussion of the disciplinary process (or maybe lack of its use) and the controversy surrounding sexuality and

membership/leadership. It seems half “the church” is upset because we have a disciplinary process and the other half is upset because it isn’t perceived as being used.” One statement encouraged more education – “I am afraid a lot of members don’t understand that at this point no change has been made to the Book of Discipline and that changes, if any, won’t occur before 2024. I think this needs to be made clear to the congregation.”

Biblical Understanding/Information around Human Sexuality

13 responses expressed more information was needed around a biblical understanding of human sexuality. These questions were heard from both sides of the spectrum and from a center seeking more understanding to determine their personal stance. Comments ranged from “What does the Bible say about homosexuality? Shame on the AUC” to “Scriptural synopsis for acceptance of openly LGBTQ+ practicing individuals in monogamous committed relationships as leaders within the lay and ordained local and district organizations.” Most comments in this section were compatibilist in their question and tone – “Discussion of Biblical interpretation on the subject.” “Biblical context on both sides. Anyone can take a Bible verse and maneuver in a way that fits their agenda no matter what “side” you are on.” “I think it would be good to provide resources to help people understand how to conduct their own research and to understand historical and theological methods of interpretation. This issue is exceedingly complex but understanding the methodology behind building a Biblical case to support either side of the issue is crucial because I'd wager a very high percentage of people have an opinion that's formed absent actual scriptural study.”

Financial/Membership Implications of Disaffiliation

Financial or membership implications of disaffiliation were raised by 12 respondents in this question. These questions were all very similar in their tone and request, most requesting the amount required by Asbury United Methodist Church should it pursue disaffiliation. Respondents asked, “The financial pros and cons of leaving the UMC.” “The exact financial obligation of disaffiliating from the UMC.” and “We need a better understanding of the financial impact as a church. While human sexuality is the issue at hand, churches leaving must pay all funds in full at time of leaving UMC. How much is this? Even if we wanted to separate from UMC, may not be able to afford to do this.” The Discernment Team was not charged to explore the process of disaffiliation and financial implications. Therefore, the Discernment Team has not requested the financial implications of disaffiliation. Should the Church Council elect to proceed with the disaffiliation process, that number can be provided by the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Denominational Differences between UMC and other Denominations around Polity and Practices

Requests regarding information about the United Methodist denomination in comparison with the polity and beliefs of other denominations was requested 11 times by respondents. Questions called for a clear comparison between the United Methodist

Church and the Global Methodist Church with one respondent stating, “Invite representatives from the UMC, Global Methodist Church and perhaps other Wesleyan denominations to meet with the congregation. Other churches have done this with some success.” Other comments or requests were less direct, stating, “What does a compromise look like for the church? What would it mean to be an Independent Methodist Church?” and “It might be good for the congregation to understand what the options are from a denomination standpoint. Additionally, there were calls to address misinformation around denominational differences and polity – “I’d like to see the church specifically address the misinformation being distributed by those churches in the NA Conference that used S2553 to disaffiliate. - communicating to members that "The UMC’s theological impasse is rooted in our differing beliefs regarding the authority of the Bible, the interpretation of the Bible, its impact on how we live out our faith, and the Lordship of Jesus." This is among the most widespread misinformation seen. - sharing that The United Methodist Church no longer believes in the resurrection of Christ. - presentations saying that in the future the UMC will force all churches to receive appointments of gay pastors, will force all clergy to officiate same-sex weddings, and that all churches must host same-sex weddings. - presenting disaffiliation as an opportunity to "own" church property or be “independent”. - claiming that The Apostles Creed has been changed. - claiming that United Methodists no longer believe in the divinity of Christ. - claiming United Methodist seminaries are teaching a variety of unchristian material by non-Christian professors.”

Specific Process and Timeline Clarification regarding Asbury’s Discernment Process

Information was requested around the specific process and timeline Asbury would follow as part of the discernment process. 12 individuals asked questions relating to these items, stating, “Could we make a flowchart? I cant tell if everyone is on the same page as far as options. Whether one agrees with the language, what are the consequences for voting yes or no, and wouldn't there be opportunity for the church as a whole to change later?” Similarly, “Perhaps, I would benefit from seeing an agenda of the next steps or how the information from the surveys will be shared. Or more clearly, what happens after the surveys?” There was also stated questions inquiring about Asbury’s discernment process in relation to other congregations – “Why are other chuches voting and Asbury is not?” and “Why is this taking so long? Other UMC have already splintered off and made the decision.”

North Alabama Conference Statistics on Churches Remaining UMC/Disaffiliating

Several respondents had questions regarding statistics of how many and what the composition of churches that have disaffiliated or have elected to remain United Methodist. Questions from this category included, “Regional and National statistics on what other UMC member churches are choosing to do as that information becomes available.” and “What is happening with the churches in the North Alabama Conference who have disaffiliated. Have they become non-denominational, part of Global Methodist, etc...”

Request for Pastoral Stance on Disaffiliation to be clarified

A number of respondents expressed a desire to know where our current pastors stand on the United Methodist Church, disaffiliation, and human sexuality. One respondent stated, "It would be helpful if the leadership of Asbury (particular the preachers) would individually state their positions on these various questions." Another stated, "A statement on where the current pastors stand."

Education around Traditional vs. Progressive Views of Human Sexuality in the United Methodist Church

Respondents also expressed a desire for more information from multiple viewpoints regarding human sexuality. One stated, "Opinions and commentary from traditionalists, progressives, and centrists!" while another said, "There are numerous concerns that have been printed by Conservative / Traditionalist Methodists. They make good points about this issue. Why aren't some of those comments made available to the church family in the spirit of no bias?"

General Conference Legislation – What has been proposed and what it means

Several respondents inquired about General Conference, proposed legislation, and the status of the legislation that was proposed for the 2020 General Conference. Questions were similar in nature to, "Exactly what is going to be considered/decided at the 2024 General Conference with regard to the Book of Discipline? Are changes relative to our stance on human sexuality being considered?" and "What is the status of the Protocol that was originally proposed for the canceled General Conference? Is that still possible to reduce some of concerns around disaffiliation?"

Additional Education Opportunities for the Asbury congregation

Additional questions were asked relating to opportunities for additional information to be presented to the Asbury congregation. Comments ranged from, "The issue is very polarizing. My "perception" is that people have a perceived opinion. It generally skews based on age although not always and there is some bias in male versus female. Huge cultural influences also exist. Therefore, I would like to see videos provided where the general church can educate themselves on both sides of the issue. I hate to see this singular issue divide a great church and a wonderful faith." to "Continue to provide podcasts and regular updates to the congregation as new information surfaces."

Q14: Category Choice Explanation

Question 14 asked, “Help the Discernment Team understand why you chose that specific category.” 550 individuals provided a response to this question, including 170 Traditional Non-Compatibilists, 193 Traditional Compatibilists, 134 Progressive Compatibilists, and 35 Progressive Non-Compatibilists. The remaining respondents did not select a category or selected “I am not sure.” Due to the personal content in these responses, direct individual quotations will not be included in this section’s analysis.

When examining responses from those who selected either Traditional Compatibilist or Progressive Compatibilist, common themes observed centered around being willing to worship alongside those who may not share the same views on human sexuality, an expressed desire to remain united despite personal opinions, and a desire to be accepting of all viewpoints. Additionally, there was an overwhelming theme from these groups of inclusion over exclusion being the default position; several held that their position was their own personal choice and should not be forced onto others who may feel differently. Many in these two categories indicated there was a “line” they would not be okay crossing. For the Traditional Compatibilists, this line was often having a self-avowed practicing homosexual pastor serving or same-sex marriages being performed at Asbury but were more open to having self-avowed practicing homosexuals become ordained or same-sex marriages being permitted in the broader United Methodist Church. This was not universally true for all respondents but was a recurring theme. Progressive Compatibilists identified a line of less inclusion and more exclusion in the broader United Methodist Church as a concern. Individuals who commented on membership at Asbury indicated they were likely to remain at Asbury as their church home.

Traditional Non-Compatibilists who provided a response were more likely to comment on foundational personal beliefs and a traditional interpretation of Scripture, exclusion of self-avowed practicing homosexuals from pastoral leadership, exclusion of self-avowed practicing homosexuals from other non-clergy leadership positions. Some even suggested that expulsion should stretch to membership in the church in general. Holding the current wording in the Book of Discipline related to human sexuality was of high importance. These were not universally true for all respondents but were recurring themes. Many respondents focused on marriage as being between one man and one woman, leaving little room for other viewpoints on this matter. While a majority of respondents did not comment on their membership status, those that did indicated they would leave Asbury and the United Methodist denomination if the Book of Discipline were changed to allow same-sex marriages or to allow self-avowed practicing homosexuals to be ordained.

Progressive Non-Compatibilists who provided a response were more likely to comment on full inclusion of all persons in ministry and the life of the church including ordained clergy, being a place for all to hear Christ’s teachings, personal beliefs and understanding of Scripture through interpretation instead of literal meaning, and God’s

grace being available to all persons. These were not universally true for all respondents but were recurring themes. Very few individuals in this category commented on their membership status at Asbury or the United Methodist Church.

Q15: Concerns about Disaffiliation and Implications

Question 15 asked, “What concerns you most about the issue before us or the implications of using Paragraph 2553 to enter into the Annual Conference process for Disaffiliation?” 635 individuals provided a response to this question. Some responses were statements while others asked questions. Questions will not be answered in this report but will be addressed in a different method to most effectively communicate with the congregation as a whole.

Responses were sorted into general categories depending on the question/comment content, but not based on the stance of the respondent or opinions expressed in the question.

Concerns about Harm to the Congregation and Community

Nearly a quarter of respondents expressed concern about the harm entering the Annual Conference disaffiliation discernment process and church vote would do to both the congregation and its surrounding community. These comments were provided by individuals who self-identified as Traditional and Progressive as well as Compatibilist and Non-Compatibilist. The majority of the comments came from those identifying as Compatibilists.

One respondent commented, “I don’t want our church to change! I see no reason for change. We are a church made up of different people who have different ideas, perhaps differing beliefs on issues, yet in spite of those differences, we all work together to glorify God!” Another commented, “My concern is that the entire process sets us up to be a divided church. Personally, I hope the council votes not to move forward with the disaffiliation process. Of course, that creates an issue for those who wanted a vote but we’re denied a vote due to the process. I suspect many of those would leave our church. On the other hand, should the council elect to move forward with the disaffiliation process, it’s likely that some, most, or all of those on the losing end of the vote will leave. In some regards, it seems a no-win situation for our church today, moving forward.” One Traditional Compatibilist commented, “I am most concerned about the possibility of division among this vibrant church which is now thriving! Our membership is growing, we are focusing on serving others, and there are so many good things happening in this church and community of faith. My wish is that we could all be "compatibilists" and continue working together to glorify God.”

Questions and Concerns about the Voting Process

More than 50 respondents expressed concerns about if, how, and when a vote might take place. Several expressed concerns about who would be eligible to vote based on membership, frequency of attendance, age, or other factors – “If members have not been

to church in years and never moved their membership somewhere else would come and vote. They may not have enough information to make an informed decision and would impact the vote of those that are regular attendees who have educated themselves on the issues. I have heard of many situations where the regular attendees wanted to leave but the vote came up short because of inactive members voted against leaving.” and “There is concern that minors (young members of the Church) & inactive members - may vote & this is not a true representation of our church community. I'm aware that global pandemic has altered church attendance (in-person and online). I would be disturbed if many of these inactives or young (immature) members' voting was not truly representative of our church family. The uncertainty of our future is concerning to many, and some have even began seeking worship at other churches.”

Many also expressed concern about when and how the church conference would occur – “If/when we enter into a vote, I hope there is a way that we can insure that every member who wants to vote gets to vote. Would an absentee ballot be available? Or multiple days for voting?” and “Each "active member" should be given the opportunity to vote on such an important decision. They should be allowed to do so without having to meet some restricting requirement such as being present at a conference.”

A clear theme of not fully understanding the process of a church conference was also observed in these comments. Many individuals were unclear or critical of the 2/3 majority required for disaffiliation as set in ¶2553 – “A simple majority should be all that is required. Their trying to stack the deck!” and “every church member would have a vote as long as they attended the Church Conference in person’ This could be very skewed depending on the time and place. This is too restrictive, every member that wants to vote should be given the opportunity to vote.”

Concerns about the Loss of a Church Home

28 respondents expressed concern about losing their church home and church family as a byproduct of a disaffiliation vote. One respondent shared, “If I do not get a clear and precise vote. It will be time to look elsewhere for a true Bible believer church home!” Another stated, “I have witnessed churches across our conference and other conferences where we have lived, and loved, and served hastily enter into the discernment process with a completely fixed mindset where the outcome of the process - a vote to disaffiliate - was almost a certainty before it even began. I have seen those churches close their doors to others who believed differently. And, in many cases, I have seen individuals who wished to remain in the UMC suddenly finding themselves without a church family and with no geographically close UMC congregations. My concern for Asbury and for this area of our own community in Birmingham is that disaffiliating would alienate a large number of people who would not have another nearby UMC to call home - especially considering that our area has already lost one other larger United Methodist congregation.” Another respondent expressed concern about having a vote and the impact that would have on individuals, saying, “I believe that if we take this to a church-wide vote, there will not be a 2/3 majority to leave the denomination, and the results will

set an expectation of those members who will feel forced to leave to save face. They will have voted to change the church. If the church does not change, I fear they will feel they have to stay their personal course and leave, even though the church is not asking them to leave.”

Desire to wait for General Conference 2024

More than 40 individuals expressed a desire to wait until after General Conference 2024 before a decision is made. One individual stated, “I would rather wait and see what is decided at General Counsel [Conference] in 2024 and not enter into the process for disaffiliation prior to then.” Another expressed, “we still don't know what will happen at the 2024 general conference. it feels a bit like putting the cart before the horse.” One Traditionalist expressed, “While I am in disagreement with United Methodist leadership that is pushing for the change in the Book of Discipline or have been ignoring it, and I would not be in favor disaffiliating until a change is actually made if that's possible.” Another stated, “That people are reacting and voting out of fear, instead of faith. That they would rather abandon the denomination than to stay and make their voices heard and votes count at the national conference. Every church that leaves waters down the American influence on how the church will vote since international counterparts appear to have voted to stay.” and “In February 2019, the special called General Conference voted to maintain the restrictive language in the Book of Discipline. I think that entering the Discernment process at this time is premature.”

Concerns about the Financial Implications of Disaffiliation

More than 30 respondents had questions or expressed concerns regarding the financial implications around disaffiliation. “Certainly the financial impact it would have is one of great concern!!! At this time, Asbury is a prime example of a church with the funds/resources available that allow it to reach out into the community and far beyond. We are amazed at the Outreach Ministries of Asbury, and we do not want to see that change!” and “Honestly, financial issues. Those can get hairy.” and “Different missions will not be able to be supported. There want [won't] be enough money for everything.”

Confusion about the Discernment Process, Disaffiliation Process, and ¶2553

Though a majority of the congregation indicated they had a “General Understanding” or “Full Understanding” in the survey, 36 respondents had questions or expressed confusion around the Discernment Process, Disaffiliation Process, or the contents of ¶2553. Voting requirements were expressed several times, with one respondent stating, “It takes 2/3 majority at the Church Conference- 1- Just a simple majority would be more fair in my opinion 2- Voting should be done at individual churches all on a designated day (preferably a Sunday) and then each church's conference rep reports the voting outcome to the Church Conference.” Another indicated confusion about why Asbury was engaged in the Discernment process, stating, “The whole process is very confusing for me. I'm confused as to why Asbury is discussing disaffiliation before the Methodist church as a whole has decided anything.” Another expressed confusion around which churches are choosing to disaffiliate, asking, “Why are traditional churches disaffiliating?”

and another asking, “What would it mean for us to disaffiliate? Are we no longer Methodist if we break away? Why can’t we maintain our current stance?”

Issues outside of Human Sexuality as a reason for Disaffiliation

22 respondents expressed opinions outside of human sexuality as reasons for disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. While reasons other than those outlined by ¶2553 are not permitted for disaffiliation, some commenters stated, “There are other issues outside of homosexuality that need to be considered as reasons for disaffiliation.” Another stated, “It concerns me that some members who are voting in this process have not fully been educated and researched this issue facing UMC. Many more issues that effect my reasons to consider leaving UMC other than just homosexuality.” One commenter expressed concern about issues outside of ¶2553 being used to influence a vote, stating, “I am concerned people will vote to disaffiliate for reasons other than the issue of human sexuality. These other reasons may be based on rumor and fear.”

Criticism of the Discernment Process

31 respondents expressed some type of criticism or displeasure with the Asbury United Methodist Church Discernment Process, the Discernment Team, or church leadership. One respondent stated, “The process is taking too long and Asbury clergy in conjunction with the national Methodist bureaucracy appear to be bias towards changing the discipline.” Another expressed concern that the Discernment Team would not reflect the desires of the congregation – “That the discernment team will not fully consider the survey results.” Another respondent expressed concern with the makeup of committees and the way teams were formed by previous leadership, stating, “I feel the discernment team as well as Church leaders are already assuming the sale - we are staying United Methodist. I have served on committees where church office have stated ‘oh yeah, the churches that were going to disaffiliate, already have. Don't foresee anymore more disaffiliating’ It has also been made evidently clear through other members of the church that we have had extensive talks with, that Pastor Kip worked hard over the years to assemble a group of people around him that held his same beliefs which were progressive. It became more and more evident to me when some of the books he suggested we read promoted LGBTQ. So in answer, what scares me is that the church office/SPRC team/discernment team aren't being open with congregation - their minds are made up. I want open conversations where you all say the truths of this situation - Parents of little ones, you could have an openly gay youth staff member that might openly talk to my child about how great the LGBTQ life, influencing my child.”

Another respondent expressed specific concerns with Asbury’s Discernment Process and timeline, stating “I don't think the church as a whole has been fully made aware of and informed of the reasons for potential disaffiliations. This process is flawed by having listening sessions as a first step before any information was issued. Further, the listening sessions did not even bring up the issue at hand. This has be a backward approach designed to water down the importance of the human sexuality issue as currently stated in the Book of Discipline. If there were no potential changes to the BOD, there would be

no need for this discussion or disaffiliation. Any movement of Asbury from the UMC should be as a result of a full membership vote, not what a discernment team arbitrarily decides based on a survey of mostly uninformed members.”

Q16: Additional Information the Discernment Team Should Know

Question 16 asked, “What additional information would you want to share with the Discernment Team regarding your feelings about entering into the Annual Conference process for Disaffiliation?” 394 individuals provided a response to this question. Many of the responses were repetitive from previous categories covered in previous questions that have already been addressed such as when and how a vote would occur, feelings of harm to the congregation from the process, calls for disaffiliation or not to disaffiliate. The quotes presented below represent themes not previously highlighted above.

“I wouldn’t go in with mind made up. Let’s see what the United Methodist Church and the Northern Alabama conference do and how they respond to these first groups disaffiliating. I’d also be interested in checking to see how these other churches that jumped first are doing 1 year, 2 years down the road before deciding anything.”

“I do like the diversity but I want everyone to strive to do what is right.”

“This process is being controlled by a few and doesn’t give the impression that it is without bias. Without hard data from The survey results and listening sessions presented to the membership, it will be impossible to guarantee that the decision in Asbury’s future is being made by Asbury membership. The process so far seems very hidden from the general membership. The appointed discernment team how too much power over this process.”

“I respect those who disagree with me but I do not believe the issue of homosexuality is central to our faith. We are called to love each other and follow Jesus. I pledge to work with anyone who sees that as our calling and our God given mission at Asbury UMC.”

“I think it is very important for the Church Council to consider the will of the congregation as discerned through this survey and through the listening sessions in its decision whether to have a disaffiliation vote. If it’s clear the disaffiliation proposal would not pass if held prior to the General Conference, it should not go forward. However, if the congregation likely would vote to disaffiliate, the Council should honor their wishes.”

“I want them to provide more background and information on what churches that have disaffiliated are doing. Is the decision to join the Global Methodist Church or the Free United Methodist or becoming non denominational pressing issues? When are we officially no longer part of The United Methodist Church? Only after Annual Conference in 2024? How long are pastors and staff paid through United Methodist Church. Please

provide these answers in a more informational way. Unfortunately, I believe an open floor Session would become too unrestrained and that helps no one.”

Appendix 4: Communications sent to the Congregation April 7, 2022 – Email



ASBURY
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Asbury Family,

A few weeks ago, we let you know General Conference had been postponed to 2024 and today, we want to share more information about Asbury United Methodist Church's plans for discerning our future as a body of Christ.

As many are aware, the United Methodist Church has been in conflict for many years regarding human sexuality and the understanding of scripture. Specifically, the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons. This has been the prominent issue, though not the only one, that has pushed our denomination towards separation. The UMC is a denomination of more than 12 million people spread across the globe, creating one of the most diverse denominations both theologically and geographically.

In November 2021, the Church Council of Asbury United Methodist Church approved the creation of a twelve-person Discernment Team to help guide the congregation through a time of exploration and information gathering to determine who we are as a church body and who we hope to be in relation to the United Methodist Church. Today, we are excited to introduce the Discernment Team to you and provide more information around their charge and processes moving forward. The Discernment Team is made up of representatives from the four committees required by the Book of Discipline (Church Council, Trustees, Finance, and Staff-Parish Relations) as well as our clergy, and four at-large members.

The Discernment Team is not a decision making body and has no ability to “decide” anything on behalf of the congregation. Their work will be provided to the Church Council and Asbury membership to prayerfully offer guidance on where Asbury’s membership stands on human sexuality and other issues.

The Discernment Team has developed a website that provides more information about the team, answers questions you may have, and will serve as a hub of information for the congregation as we begin this process together. We encourage you to spend a few minutes looking through the page and check back regularly as we add more information, resources, and ways you can engage in the process. In addition, we will be providing updates and more information as we move forward about opportunities to participate in the process.

[Visit The Discernment Team Page](#)

We invite you to be in prayer for the Discernment Team as they begin this process on behalf of our church. We pray this process will not only help us answer the immediate questions before us, but provide us with a way forward for the future as a faithful and committed body of Christ.

Prayerfully,

Rev. Dr. Bill Morgan
Rev. Robert Mercer
Rev. Maggie Dunaway

Stay in Touch.



Asbury UMC | 6690 Cahaba Valley Road, Birmingham, AL 35242

August 5, 2022 – Email



Dear Asbury Family,

This summer, the Discernment Team at Asbury has been hard at work preparing for a season of research and prayer. If you are not aware of the Discernment Team at Asbury, the purpose of this team is to learn more about our congregation and its views and thereby provide guidance to the Church Council on what is best for our Church in our denomination's developing stance on human sexuality. As a reminder, the Discernment Team **does not** have any decision-making power but will act as an information-gathering resource to make recommendations to the Church Council and, if needed, the Church Conference.

The Discernment team has been divided into two subgroups: a Survey Group and a Listening Session Group. This Fall, we will begin surveying our congregation and holding listening sessions in order to give everyone a chance to share their views, hopes, and dreams for Asbury.

Asbury has a rich history as a church open to many different views. You might call Asbury a "Big Tent" church. This is what makes Asbury so special! However, it can make decisions on polarizing issues very complicated. The discernment process has been established to help our church family have an organized and fair process with clear communication made to all leadership structures and to the church at large. We are committed to doing our best to provide the most accurate information about our church family so that our leadership teams can make sound decisions for Asbury.

We understand that it may seem as if we are moving slowly as news of some of our sister congregations entering into the deliberative stages of the process of disaffiliation from our denomination. It is important to remember that the vast majority of United Methodist congregations are not in the disaffiliation process. The position of Human Sexuality in the United Methodist Church has been consistent since 1972 and can only be changed by the General Conference which meets again in 2024. There are still questions about whether or not the position of the denomination will change or whether or not there will be more freedom within the denomination to "agree to disagree" as John Wesley once said.

Please continue to pray for our church and for our denomination as well as our committees and teams. You can stay connected to the discernment process by going to asburybham.org/discernment.

September 16, 2022 – Email



Discernment Team Process Update

In this email:

- A. The Nature and Work of the Discernment Team at Asbury UMC
- B. The Uniqueness of our Discernment Process during this Season
- C. The Listening Sessions Scheduled for October 2022
- D. Concluding Pastoral Message

As I reflect upon my first two months as the Senior Pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church, I know that God has (through our Bishop and the United Methodist Church) brought me to a vital congregation that inspires, disciples, and serves. I cannot keep track of all the things on our calendar much less the countless lives touched by our church family. I know it will take time to meet you all, but I have already been blessed to spend time with several groups and committees in our church as well as make hospital visits and host meetings in my office with members of the congregation. Everyone has been so very kind and generous to us. Thank you for welcoming my family into the Asbury family.

As you will see below, a team was already in place before I was appointed to Asbury to help us navigate through the complex waters of denominational disagreement. As of last Sunday, I have met with this team twice and I have been so very impressed by their love of our church family, their faith in Jesus Christ, and their Christian character. You will receive more information over the next few months about the process outlined below. Please read carefully and if you have any questions, please direct them to our church office. Please pay close attention to the nature of our process as well as the timing of our listening sessions!

A. In November 2021, the Church Council of Asbury United Methodist Church approved the creation of a 12-person Discernment Team to help guide the congregation through a time of exploration and information gathering to determine who we are as a church body and who we hope to be in relation to the United Methodist Church. The Discernment Team at Asbury United Methodist Church is made up of representatives from the four committees required by the Book of Discipline (Church Council, Trustees, Finance, and Staff-Parish Relations) as well as some of our pastors and four at-large members. In the coming months, the Discernment Team will hear from and analyze as many voices in the congregation as possible. After listening to and interpreting their survey results, they will make a recommendation to the Church Council.

More information about the Discernment Team at Asbury UMC (including the members of our team) can be found here: [Discernment Team](#)

B. The discernment process that Asbury UMC's Discernment Team is using was developed by Brentwood United Methodist Church in Nashville, TN, and is currently being used by several other large United Methodist Churches in the Birmingham area. Our discernment process began

before the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church provided the details for the discernment process for local churches to begin the process of discerning disaffiliation. Just to be perfectly clear, Asbury UMC is *not* currently in the process of disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church. Any decision will be clearly communicated to the entire church. If the process of disaffiliation begins, the church family will have clear instructions as to what steps are required.

C. The Discernment Team at Asbury United Methodist Church will hold listening sessions during the month of October (next month). Listening sessions will be provided for specific groups such as Adult Sunday School Classes, leadership teams, and our teenage professing members. Specific group leaders will be contacted directly to schedule their sessions and information on the open registration sessions will be available prior to October 1. Additional listening sessions will be open to the congregation who may not be part of these groups, but registration will be required for these open listening sessions. The Discernment Team will then process this information and create a church-wide survey which will be administered at the beginning of 2023.

D. We are embarking upon a journey of faithful deliberation together as a church family. We will study the Scriptures, we will pray for one another, and we will share what is upon each of our hearts. During this season we will need to act with Christian integrity - becoming as Christlike as possible - and allowing the Holy Spirit to work through the process. We will need to see one another as Jesus sees us. We will need to listen to one another as Christ listened to the hurting in his presence. And, we will need to speak the truth in love. All of this will take some time. A wise pastor recently told us, "you cannot fast-track the Holy Spirit." He is right. We are in the hands of the Living God who is always making all things new and who is working in all things for the good of those who love Him.

Author Max Lucado reminds us, "God works in all things. Not a few things, **in all things.**" May God work through these next few months to pave our way forward in faith and nurture our hearts and minds to be wise enough and gentle enough to walk together on that path.

In Christ,



Rev. Mike Holly

October 13, 2022 – Email



Asbury Family,

Over the last several weeks, the Discernment Team has been holding listening sessions with the congregation to provide an opportunity to share their feelings and understanding around splintering in the United Methodist Church over the issue of human sexuality. After five sessions, we've had nearly 200 people participate. We want to ensure that every member has the opportunity to be heard during this initial work by the Discernment Team.

If you have haven't already, we encourage you to come to a listening session and participate. You can sign up for a listening session by [clicking here](#) or visit www.asburybham.org/discernment for more information. If there is not a session time that is convenient for you, please let us know. If you aren't able to attend a listening session, we encourage you to email your thoughts or questions directly to the Discernment Team at discernment@asburybham.org.

Still have questions about the issues within our denomination and the discernment team? [Listen to a conversation](#) with Pastors Mike Holly and Robert Mercer, where they help unpack the United Methodist Book of Discipline and explain how laws are written, interpreted, and enforced. They also talk about scripture: how United Methodists read it, interpret it, and live by it.

We ask that you continue to pray for the remaining listening sessions, the Discernment Team leading these sessions, and most importantly, the entire Asbury family.

Prayerfully,
Discernment Team

November 7, 2022 – Email



ASBURY
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

DISCERNMENT INFORMATION SESSION
with Rev. Mike Holly
Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.
(Sanctuary)

As you know, our [Discernment Team](#) has been tasked with helping our Church Council navigate through the current disagreement within the United Methodist denomination. This ad-hoc team has met to pray and prepare for the work of listening to the congregation as well as to the Holy Spirit. During the month of October, the Discernment Team heard from a wide array of members and groups from the Asbury church family.

On Wednesday, November 16, 2022, at 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary, Rev. Mike Holly will provide a brief report on the Discernment Team's work from the October Listening Sessions. He will also map out the next steps for the team in their work for our church. Our hope is that this first report will answer a few questions as well as to provide you with further information to help you personally and prayerfully discern.

This event is open to anyone invested and involved at Asbury UMC. Childcare and programs will be provided and a church-wide dinner is available but you must [register and purchase a meal](#) if you plan to eat. If you are not able to attend in person, a video presentation of the same information will be emailed church wide.

Prayerfully,
Discernment Team

November 16, 2022 – Email



Right now in Asbury's Sanctuary, Pastor Mike is offering a brief report on the Discernment Team's work from the October Listening Sessions. He is also mapping out the [next steps](#) for the Discernment Team in their work for our church. Our hope is that this first report will answer a few questions as well as to provide you with further information to help you personally and prayerfully discern.

Tonight's meeting was open to anyone invested and involved at Asbury UMC and we have created this virtual update for those who could not attend in person. You may also visit the [Discernment Team website](#) for additional information.



Still have questions about the issues within our denomination and the discernment team? [Listen to a conversation](#) with Pastors Mike Holly and Robert Mercer, where they help unpack the United Methodist Book of Discipline and explain how laws are written, interpreted, and enforced. They also talk about scripture: how United Methodists read it, interpret it, and live by it.

If you have any questions or concerns, our Discernment Team wants to hear from you. You can send an email to: discernment@asburybham.org.

You can also schedule a meeting with a pastor or request a pastor to meet with your class or small group. Call the main office at 205.995.1700 and ask for more information or reach out to a [pastor](#) directly.



December 12, 2022 – Email



Dear Asbury family,

This past Saturday, the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church met at the BJCC to worship and celebrate Holy Communion one final time with the pastors and delegates of 198 area churches who disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church. It was a Called Annual Conference session ([watch on YouTube](#)), and your four pastors and four lay delegates attended as representatives of our Asbury family. The eight representatives from Asbury sat with Pastor Greg Foust who was also in attendance. We all agreed that while it was a difficult and painful event, it was done in a faithful and respectful way by our annual conference under the leadership of Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett.

These 198 churches used a new paragraph within the [United Methodist Book of Discipline \(2553\)](#), which allows for churches to leave the denomination if they meet certain criteria and if they have a 2/3 majority of their membership approve the disaffiliation. The only valid criterion for a church vote is opposition to the current or potential language in the Book of Discipline related to human sexuality.

Following the December 10th Called Conference, there are 440 churches, including Asbury, that remain in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Reports say that of the 21 United Methodist Churches in North Alabama with a membership of over 1,000 members, seven have decided to disaffiliate from the denomination. Fourteen are either staying or are in discernment. Of those seven disaffiliating congregations, three will become independent churches, while one is joining a new denomination called the Global Methodist Church. I am not currently aware of the plans of the other three congregations.

In terms of what is happening with the remaining churches in our Annual Conference, some are in their own independent process of discernment, like [Asbury](#). Other churches are in a conference-guided discernment process leading to a church-wide vote. Finally, other churches have decided to remain United Methodist awaiting the outcome of the General Conference in 2024, or have decided to remain UMC regardless of the outcome.

On a personal note, I have long-time friends that are no longer United Methodist pastors following Saturday's meeting. It has been difficult, and I will do everything that I can to remain friends and fellow Christians with any disaffiliating pastors. Our bishop remarked that we came to the altar to receive Holy Communion as members of the same denomination, but we would leave the table of Christ as ecumenical friends.

As mentioned previously, Asbury is still in an [independent discernment process](#), and we will offer every member an opportunity to help give us clarity with a church-wide survey

in early 2023. Once the data from the listening sessions and surveys is compiled, it will be presented to the church council, which will vote on whether Asbury enters the conference-guided discernment process that leads to a church-wide vote. We do not yet know what our future holds, but we do know who holds the future.

In the meantime, Asbury family, I beg you to remain focused on Christ and his amazing and abundant grace. We can come together even in this time of uncertainty to marvel at what God is about to do again as God makes everything new...as God destroys fear and sin...and as God creates new life and a hopeful future that all begins with the birth of Jesus in the manger.

Do not distance yourself from the birth of Jesus! Join the shepherds and the magi. Come together and adore the Newborn King. And remember that God is always for us and never against us.

Amen (Let It Be),

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike".

Pastor Mike Holly

January 24, 2023 – Email



Dear Asbury family,

As we begin a new year of ministry and mission together at Asbury United Methodist Church, we are also continuing in the prayerful work of Discernment. Our Discernment Team is making some final edits to the Church-Wide Survey after some initial drafts were looked over by research and data specialists in the private sector. The Discernment Team plans to launch the survey in early February.

Our goal is to have as many people as possible participate in the survey so that we receive thoughts and views from across our membership. Our Discernment Team will send out reminders about the survey and its deadline. The Team plans on reporting the data from this survey as well as other data collected during the listening sessions, information sessions, and individual communications with the Discernment Team to the Church Council in late Spring or early Summer.

As we prepare to send out the survey, we want to ensure we have the correct email address for each person worshipping at Asbury. If you are sharing an email address with someone in your household or you are not currently receiving email from Asbury, we ask that you **update your contact information** with us to ensure everyone receives the survey. We ask that you do this as soon as possible so there is no delay in receiving the survey link. If you have questions, **contact the church office**.

In order to prepare to take the survey, please make every effort to visit Asbury's **Discernment Team website** for information, frequently asked questions, and a timeline of what to expect.

If you still have questions about the issues within our denomination and the discernment team, we invite you to **listen to a conversation** between Rev. Robert Mercer and I where we unpacked relevant parts of the United Methodist Book of Discipline and explained how laws are written, interpreted, and enforced in the United Methodist Church. We also talk about scripture: how United Methodists read it, interpret it, and live by it.

If you have any questions or concerns, our Discernment Team wants to hear from you. You can send an email to **discernment@asburybham.org**.

Please continue to pray for Asbury UMC and for God's guidance and grace throughout this process.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike".

Pastor Mike Holly

February 23, 2023 – Email



Dear Friends,

The response to the church-wide survey from Asbury's Discernment Team has been tremendous. Around 830 persons have completed the survey as of Thursday, February 23, 2023.

We want to remind you that your unique voice is needed if you have not completed the survey. We have asked every active participant and member of Asbury United Methodist Church to complete the survey by February 28. If you cannot find your unique link to the online survey, please check your junk/spam folder and then contact us at **discernment@asburybham.org** for a new link. You may also stop by the church's main office during normal operating hours to pick up a paper copy of the survey. Paper copies of the survey will also be available this Sunday, February 26 outside of the Foust Family Life Center/Gym. You can drop off completed paper surveys at either of these places as well.

If you have any questions or concerns, the Discernment Team wants to hear from you. You can send an email to **discernment@asburybham.org**.

Please continue to pray for Asbury UMC and for God's guidance and grace throughout this process.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike".

Rev. Mike Holly
Senior Pastor

March 3, 2023 – Email



Dear Friends,

Thank you to the almost 1,000 persons who participated in the Church-Wide Survey produced by Asbury United Methodist Church's Discernment Team. This tremendous response will be very helpful to Asbury's Church Council in prayerfully considering the next steps for our church family.

The final deadline to submit surveys will be Sunday, March 5 at 11:59pm. This includes both online and paper surveys. Paper surveys can be dropped off on Sunday morning at either Welcome Desk.

As you can imagine, it will take some time to carefully review all the information contained in so many surveys. Asbury United Methodist Church's Discernment Team will diligently work through the responses over the next few months and will then provide a final report and recommendation to the Church Council this spring.

The Church Council plans to make the report and recommendation available to the congregation after it is received and before the Church Council takes any action. Details on how the report and recommendation will be shared with the congregation at large will be a topic for our Church Council in its next few meetings.

Our church is named after the pioneering Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. Asbury once shared his personal aspiration:

"My desire is to live more to God today than yesterday, and to be more holy this hour than the last."

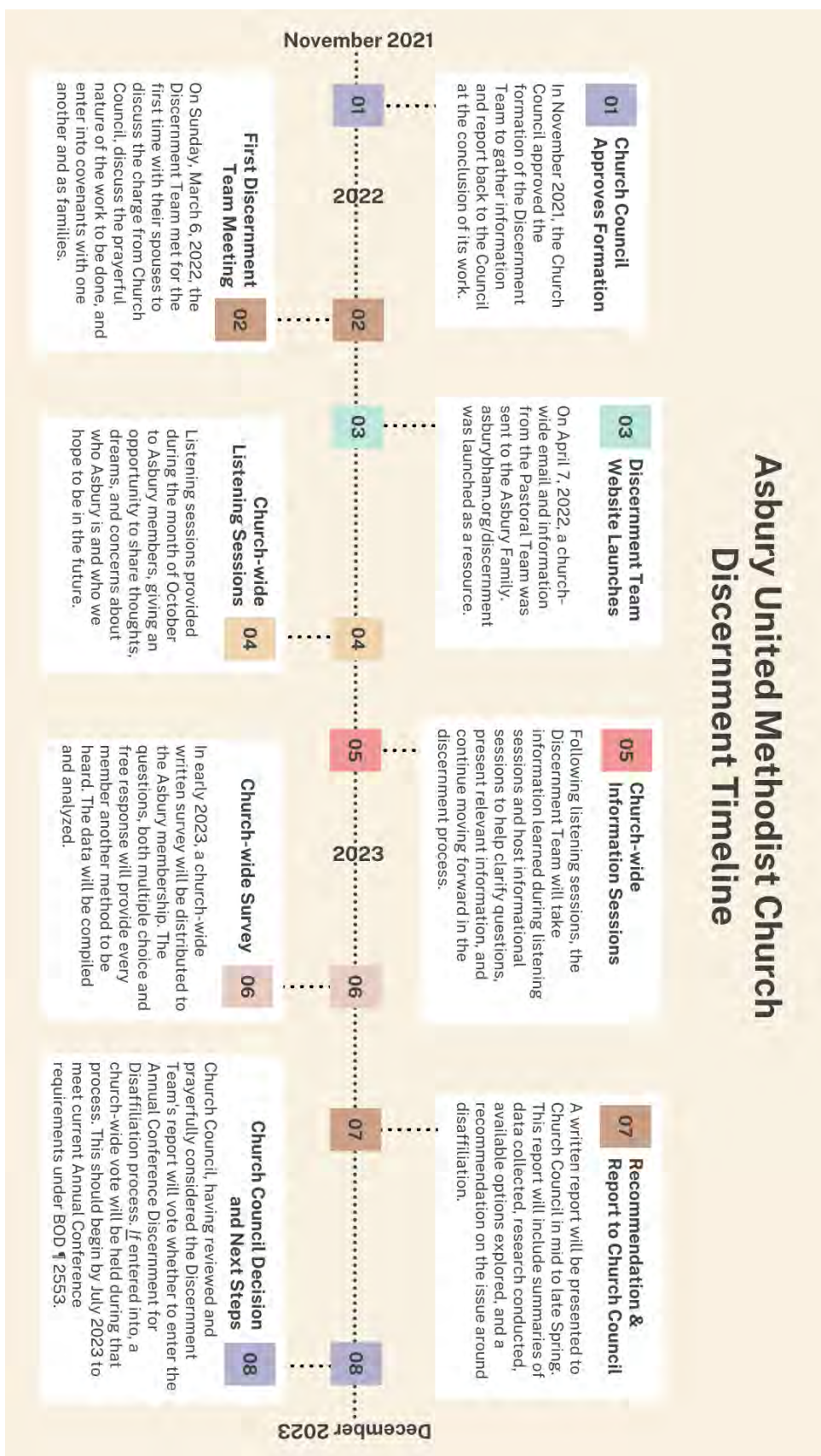
As we continue in this season of prayerful discernment and Lenten spiritual formation, let us all desire to live more to God today than yesterday. Every day. Amen.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike".

Rev. Mike Holly
Senior Pastor

Appendix 5: Discernment Process Timeline



Appendix 6: Referenced Book of Discipline Paragraphs

¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

1. Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.

2. **Time Limits** - The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.

3. **Decision Making Process** - The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.

4. **Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church** - If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. The terms and conditions, including the effective date of disaffiliation, shall be memorialized in a binding Disaffiliation Agreement between the annual conference and the trustees of the local church, acting on behalf of the members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:

a) **Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement** - The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶ 2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.

b) **Apportionments** - The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments.

c) **Property** - A disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. All transfers of property shall be made prior to disaffiliation. All costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.

d) **Pension Liabilities** - The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.

e) **Other Liabilities** - The local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.

f) **Payment Terms** - Payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure.

g) **Disaffiliating Churches Continuing as Plan Sponsors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits Plans** - The United Methodist Church believes that a local church disaffiliating under ¶2553 shall continue to share common religious bonds and convictions with The United Methodist Church based on shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, unless the local church expressly resolves to the contrary. As such, a local church disaffiliating under ¶ 2553 shall continue to be eligible to sponsor voluntary employee benefit plans through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits under ¶ 1504.2, subject to the applicable terms and conditions of the plans.

h) **Once the disaffiliating local church has reimbursed** the applicable annual conference for all funds due under the agreement, and provided that there are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against The United Methodist Church as a result of the disaffiliation, in consideration of the provisions of this paragraph, the applicable annual conference shall release any claims that it may have under ¶ 2501 and other paragraphs of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church commonly referred to as the trust clause, or under the agreement.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2019 Addendum. © 2019 by The United Methodist Publishing House.

¶ 246. The Charge Conference

Members of the charge conference shall be persons of genuine Christian character who love the Church, are morally disciplined, are committed to the mandate of inclusiveness in the life of the Church, are loyal to the ethical standards of The United Methodist Church set forth in the Social Principles, and are competent to administer its affairs. It shall include youth members chosen according to the same standards as adults. All shall be professing members of the local church, except where central conference legislation provides otherwise. The pastor shall be the administrative officer, and as such shall be an ex officio member of all conferences, boards, councils, commissions, committees, and task forces, unless restricted by the *Discipline*.

¶ 246. *General Provisions* - 1. Within the pastoral charge the basic unit in the connectional system of The United Methodist Church is the **charge conference**. The charge conference shall therefore be organized from the church or churches in every pastoral charge as set forth in the Constitution (¶ 43). It shall meet annually for the purposes set forth in ¶ 247. It may meet at other times as indicated in § 7 below.

2. The membership of the charge conference shall be all members of the church council or other appropriate body, together with retired ordained ministers and retired diaconal ministers who elect to hold their membership in said charge conference and any others as may be designated in the *Discipline*. If more than one church is on the pastoral charge, all members of each church council shall be members of the charge conference.

3. The charge conference may make provision for recognition of the faithful service of members of the church council by electing them honorary members. An honorary member shall be entitled to all the privileges of a member, except the right to vote.

4. The district superintendent shall fix the time of meetings of the charge conference. The charge conference shall determine the place of meeting.

5. The district superintendent shall preside at the meetings of the charge conference or may designate an elder to preside.

6. The members present and voting at any duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum.

7. Special sessions may be called by the district superintendent after consultation with the pastor of the charge, or by the pastor with the written consent of the district superintendent. The purpose of such special session shall be stated in the call, and only such business shall be transacted as is in harmony with the purposes stated in the call. Any such special session may be convened as a church conference in accordance with ¶ 248.

8. Notice of time and place of a regular or special session of the charge conference shall be given at least ten days in advance by two or more of the following (except as local laws may otherwise provide): from the pulpit of the church, in its weekly bulletin, in a local church publication, or by mail.

9. A charge conference shall be conducted in the language of the majority, with adequate provision being made for translation.

10. A **joint charge conference** for two or more pastoral charges may be held at the same time and place, as the district superintendent may determine.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2016. Copyright 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

¶ 248. The Church Conference

To encourage broader participation by members of the church, the charge conference may be convened as the **church conference**, extending the vote to all professing members of the local church present at such meetings.

The church conference shall be authorized by the district superintendent. It may be called at the discretion of the district superintendent or following a written request to the district superintendent by one of the following: the pastor, the church council, or 10 percent of the professing membership of the local church. In any case a copy of the request shall be given to the pastor. Additional regulations governing the call and conduct of the charge conference as set forth in ¶¶ 246-247 shall apply also to the church conference.

A joint church conference for two or more churches may be held at the same time and place as the district superintendent may determine. A church conference shall be conducted in the language of the majority with adequate provision being made for translation. (For church local conference see ¶ 2527.)

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2016. Copyright 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

Discernment Team Footnote: The ability to request a Church Conference for the purpose of a vote on a motion of disaffiliation must follow ¶ 2553 and cannot be requested or approved using provisions in ¶ 248 alone.

¶ 252. The Church Council

¶ 252.1. *Purpose* - The **church council** shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life. It shall envision, plan, implement, and annually evaluate the mission and ministry of the church. The church council shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference (¶ 244).

2. *Mission and Ministry* - Nurture, outreach, and witness ministries and their accompanying responsibilities include:

- a) The nurturing ministries of the congregation shall give attention to but not be limited to education, worship, Christian formation, membership care, small groups, and stewardship. Attention must be given to the needs of individuals and families of all ages.
- b) The outreach ministries of the church shall give attention to local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy. These ministries include church and society, global ministries, higher education and campus ministry, health and welfare, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and the status and role of women.
- c) The witness ministries of the church shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; Lay Servant Ministries; and other means that give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ.
- d) The leadership development and resourcing ministries shall give attention to the ongoing preparation and development of lay and clergy leaders for the ministry of the church (¶ 258.1).
- e) The nurture, outreach, and witness ministries and their accompanying responsibilities shall include consideration of (i) the election of a prayer coordinator to promote prayer and mobilize the local church to pray, (ii) establishing a prayer room or designated place for prayer and prayer resources, and (iii) encouraging intentional prayer for the pastoral leadership of the local church.

3. *Meetings* – a) The council shall meet at least quarterly. The chairperson or the pastor may call special meetings.

b) In order for the council to give adequate consideration to the missional purpose of the local church, it is recommended that the first agenda item at each meeting be related to its ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness. The administrative and supportive responsibilities of the church will then be given attention. It is recommended that the council use a consensus/discernment model of decision-making.

4. *Other Responsibilities* - It will also be the responsibility of the church council to:

- a) review the membership of the local church;
- b) fill interim vacancies occurring among the lay officers of the church between sessions of the annual charge conference;
- c) establish the budget on recommendation of the committee on finance and ensure adequate provision for the financial needs of the church;
- d) recommend to the charge conference the salary and other remuneration of the

pastor(s) and staff members after receiving recommendations from the committee on pastor-parish relations (staff-parish relations);

e) review the recommendation of the committee on pastor-parish relations regarding provision of adequate housing for the pastor(s), and report the same to the charge conference for approval. Housing provisions shall comply with the annual conference housing policy and parsonage standards. Housing shall not be considered as part of compensation or remuneration except to the extent provided for in denominational pension and benefit plans.

5. *Membership* - The charge conference will determine the size of the church council. Members of the church council shall be involved in the mission and ministry of the congregation as defined in ¶ 252.2. The membership of the council may consist of as few as eleven persons or as many as the charge conference deems appropriate. The council shall include persons who represent the program ministries of the church as outlined in ¶ 243. The membership shall include but not be limited to the following:

- a) the chairperson of the church council;
- b) the lay leader;
- c) the chairperson and/or a representative of the pastor-parish relations committee;
- d) the chairperson and/or a representative of the committee on finance;
- e) the chairperson and/or a representative of the board of trustees;
- f) the church treasurer;
- g) a lay member to annual conference;
- h) the president and/or a representative of the United Methodist Men;
- i) the president and/or a representative of the United Methodist Women;
- j) a young adult representative
- k) a representative of the United Methodist Youth;
- l) the pastor(s).

6. *Quorum* - The members present and voting at any duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2016. Copyright 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

Discernment Team Footnote: The current members of the Asbury United Methodist Church's Church Council are available online at www.asburybham.org/lay-leadership.