

Our Voices

Pell City Stay United Methodist Voices—October 2022



Kim Hoyle Hazelwood

In my youth, my church experiences were primarily through VBS and the occasional Wednesday nights with my cousin and friends. It was not until my husband and I moved back to Pell City with our young children in 2012 that I began regularly attending church. Why church after 33 years? Although ‘unchurched,’ I knew that I was missing something in my life. I felt that everything happened for a reason and according to ‘a plan,’ but I had no explanation for these feelings. When I attended church as a younger person, I felt out of place, uncomfortable, and unwelcome because I did not know how to ‘church’: what came next in the service, how to sing the hymns, how to pray. I knew before I even had children that I wanted them to have a different faith experience. I also wanted their ‘village’ to be full of people that shared our family’s values and had diverse life experiences.

Why Pell City First United Methodist? I’ve explained to others that walking into a church for the first time as an adult by yourself is extremely intimidating. Where do I sit? Will I know anyone? However, I had visited PCFUMC on many occasions with my husband’s grandmother, Varona Perry, and it was as close to a church home as I had ever had. I came to find out that many friends attended, and my children and I were made to feel welcome. I soon became involved with the children’s program, and eventually, came to feel the most comfortable in Wide Open Worship.

The church experiences that I had as a child made me feel shamed and fearful. The only message that I heard was to know the Lord or go to Hell. It’s terrifying to hear such a statement when you do not feel comfortable at church in order to get to know the Lord. I found PC FUMC to be a stark contrast, in that I left each service feeling loved by a God that extends immeasurable grace, despite my being the sinner that I am. Sermons left me feeling hopeful and encouraged to be a better Christian by extending the same grace to the least, the lost, and the last. *I want to attend worship where I and others are not shamed or silently discriminated against because of who I vote for, what personal liberties I believe in, and what social justice issues I support.*

I walk through the doors of PC FUMC to learn how I can be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. I can - because I have for 10 years - do this sitting next to my neighbor who has differences of political opinion. I am not at church to argue right and wrong according to what clip I see on television or what headline I read online. I just want to continue to grow as a Christian - in God’s image - with good people who want the same experience for themselves and their families.

Believe me, I do understand how others’ decisions and actions that are counter to one’s own beliefs can be upsetting. But I encourage you to consider the reality of the world that we live in. We are in the most divisive time in recent history, politically and socially. Our children and grandchildren are growing up with more opportunities to be negatively influenced than any of us did. No one is perfect or without flaw and sin. This is our opportunity to live into the PCFUMC purpose -

to be a community of believers seeking to transform lives through Jesus Christ. This work begins with our hearts and lives being changed with the grace and love of God and extends to Pell City, the Lake Logan Martin area, around our country and across the world. We are empowered by God to put action to our faith through passion in worship, nurture through discipleship, and loving service to others. ♥

He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8



Joy Lee

I grew up in the Southern Baptist Church and did not become Methodist until I married and moved to Pell City.

There are numerous facets of the Methodist church that I came to appreciate over the years—the emphasis on grace, the inclusion of women pastors, and the respectfulness shown toward those who come from different religious traditions, to name a few. The last item mentioned has been put to the test recently, and unfortunately I don’t see as much of that as I once did. I will vote to stay UMC because I believe strongly in all those things mentioned above. I will also vote to stay UMC for the message it sends to those in our community who may already feel ostracized or “less than.” I have friends and acquaintances in the LGBTQ

community, individuals who worship and serve in many areas in their churches and communities. I cannot in good conscience vote to do anything that will hurt those people anymore than they have already been hurt by society, by Christians in particular. *I do not claim to have all the answers, but if I'm going to make a mistake on this particular issue, I would rather err on the side of love and inclusion than hate and division.* Much like the Church's views on slavery and women, I can't help but wonder what people will say about this period in church history in 50 or 100 years. I may not change anyone's mind with what I have written here, but I hope I have shed some light on "the other side" and what many of us are feeling and thinking as we go through this difficult discernment process. ♥



Eric Hicks

We had a perfectly good church. We worshiped together; we fellowshiped together; we served together; and we've grown in faith together. For many of us, some of our closest friendships are here.

We've always been a diverse church. Some of us are cradle Methodists. Others were raised Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran, you get the idea. Some of us prefer early worship; some want to worship later; Some of us like traditional worship; others prefer contemporary worship or lakeside worship. *Some believe that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin; others are equally convinced that the Bible does not teach that loving monogamous same-sex relationships are sinful; and some of us think things are not clear, but I believe it is better to err on the side of love and grace than on the side of judgmentalism.*

Yet, even with all these differences, we have still been an effective church. We are family. And

the differences between us are part of what has made us strong. It was actually the mix of thought here that first attracted me to PCFUMC forty years ago, when the Baptists took a hard right turn. And that same diversity of thought has helped me grow as a Christian.

We are all trying to be faithful. And we need to respect that. We are all on a path to holiness, though we may be at different places on that path. My understanding of God and the Bible is not the same now as it once was, and it is my hope that God will continue to reveal Himself to me and to you as we move along our spiritual journeys.

One of the greatest joys I have as a Christian is when I receive a new spiritual insight. *No one has a perfect understanding of spiritual things. We see through a glass darkly.*

But some among us have decided that their understanding is the only possible interpretation. Some want to redefine us narrowly. They do not respect the diversity of faithful understanding, but are attempting to fit us all into their mold. And this is not the Methodist way.

Wesley said,

"Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."

Every one of us chose PCFUMC. Every one of us answered the same questions when we joined the church. We each promised to faithfully participate in its ministries with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. And every one of us is worried that the church we chose is going to change.

We're trying to fix something that's not broken. As a local congregation, we have functioned amazingly well as a true community of faith, despite our differences. That's the beauty of

Methodism: there is room for us to each seek God's truths as God leads us to deeper and deeper understanding.

It seems unconscionable to throw away the bond we have when we agree on so much. The whole thing is a giant distraction. And it's tearing us apart. Why are we trying to define ourselves on this one issue? *Can't we just respect each other enough to say my brother and sister and I disagree on this, but they are still my brother and sister, and get on with the business of being the church?*

We have a choice to make. One choice, to stay United Methodist, allows us all—Traditionalists, Moderates, and Progressives, and all the colors in between—to continue as a family, worshiping, fellowshiping, growing, and serving together. The other choice, disaffiliation, says some of us are not welcome here, unless we set aside our convictions and conform to their way of thinking. And this, my friends, is something many of us can't bring ourselves to do. It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, I wonder whether either group can survive without the other.

In the United Methodist Church, there is a place for conservatives and moderates and progressives. We are better together. Let's not destroy the thing we love. ♥



Bobbilene Myers

My son is gay. He came out to me when he was 15 years old. But I knew it when he was 4. So did my dad, mom and sister. So when he came out to us, it didn't come as a surprise. None of us had a problem with that. He's my son, he's their grandson and nephew, always and forever! We loved him before this news and we love him after. I asked my dad if this would interfere with his profession and he said "NO, he is my grandson now and forever!" You see, my father is a retired Methodist

Minister of 37 years. So as you can tell, I grew up United Methodist. I know no other way. I'm proud to be United Methodist!

My only fear has been for someone to harm my child because he is gay. In high school there was one incident where an older kid did threaten him, but I thank the Lord it was taken care of quickly and there were no other issues. My son was popular, caring, outgoing, and gay in high school. After that one incident, he had a good high school experience. And I thank God for that each and every day.

We love our son unconditionally, as we should! This was not a choice, it's who he is. Given a choice, I don't think he would have chosen to go through what he's gone through. As I said above, I knew he was gay at age four, as did my parents and sister. You can't choose at that age! Not possible! He is who he is and I love him with all my heart.

United Methodists accept him for who he is. That's where I belong and that's where I'll stay!♥



Penny Arnold

Fear is a powerful motivator. It can bring out the worst in us. *Let us not be motivated by fear.*

Let us be motivated by love and compassion. Until this year, I did not know that some in our congregation wanted to leave the United Methodist Church. Like many of you, I was serving in a variety of church ministries and I was not fearful or anxious.

Like many of you, I came to PCFUMC looking for a place to grow spiritually and a place where my son could grow up in God's grace. Like some of you, I grew up in Baptist churches, with life-changing mentors who were positive influences. I also experienced the power of divisive politics when Southern Baptists went through a similar nasty split in the late 1980s. When I was looking for a church

here I did not want to attend a church that was political. I did not want to attend a church where politics is preached from the pulpit, people are judged by their political stances, and leaders pressure you to vote a certain way. *For me—especially during this time of extremely polarized national politics—it is important that I remain connected to people who view things differently than I do—both as a Christian and as a citizen.* For me, it's important to focus on the essential beliefs we share. I like to remind myself that God is not Methodist or Baptist, Democrat or Republican, Conservative or Liberal, or even American. Remembering that God transcends our human categories puts them in a healthier perspective for me. I want to be in a church where the focus is on worship, service, Bible study, and learning to more closely follow Jesus in real life situations in our world. This is what PCFUMC is to me.

John 13:35 reads, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." I first visited the church because I met Jack and Jean Lincoln and Steve and Sally Smith in the local arts council. It was these loving people, not their politics, that drew me to the church. I thought, if they go to the Methodist church, maybe I should check it out.

I later joined the church while Sam Huffstutler was pastor. Ronnie and Teresa Harris were in the new member class with me. I remember their great stories from a recent trip to the Holy Land. Soon I met Kaye Cloud, Judy Hicks, Jenny Gauld, Carole Barnett, Ava Rozelle, and many other loving members. Nathan Carden was on staff. Then Arthur Harrison, Byron Vance, and Belinda. Kristina Alexander and Kristi Edwards strengthened our children and youth programs. Rachel and Joe arrived during the Pandemic, shining their light on Christian spirituality, prayer, and justice through their sermons,

classes, and Foster Kids Night Out. Now Wes brings his preaching skills and heart for Jesus to our congregation. In all of that time I never heard politics preached from the pulpit. I never felt political judgment or pressure. On the contrary, I constantly hear and see the grace and love of God through Jesus. I have witnessed all of our pastors ministering tirelessly to members, families, youth, the elderly, the sick, shut-ins, those grieving, people in every kind of need—with a solemn Christian agenda, not a political one. Within the church there is a variety of theological and political views—which each person is entitled to. Some are fiscally conservative and socially moderate, or the other way around. Some have traditional views about this or that and more progressive views about another issue. We are much more complex than the labels we use for each other.

When I study the Bible closely, I sometimes wrestle. Faithful Christians have wrestled with interpretation of Scripture for centuries. As Wes pointed out in his sermon a few weeks ago, we don't get to pick and choose which verses to include or exclude. We have to wrestle with them all. According to biblical law, a man could sell his daughter as a slave. God's Word has been used to justify war, slavery, polygamy, genocide, excluding women and divorced people from leadership, and more. Now Methodists choose to argue over homosexuality. Fortunately we have guidance in the example of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. But faithful Christians disagree. Faithful, lifelong, Methodist Christians have left this church because it isn't progressive enough! Some complain that the church is too "progressive" and define themselves as "traditionalist." This supports my belief that most in our church are centrists. We have a lot more in common than our differences. We worship together,

pray together, stand and proclaim our common beliefs in the Apostles Creed. We break the bread of Christ together, prepare meals for the hungry, and serve the needy in our community. We bring our children and youth here for wholesome fun and Christian education. We are supposed to model for them how to be Christians in our world today. Have we been good and holy models for our children lately?

We, the people—not the property—are God’s church. I believe that God continues to work through this United Methodist church. As an artist, I am keenly aware of how a group of people can look at the same thing and each see something different. Perhaps it takes all of us together to see the fullness of God’s glory and grace. ♥



Andala Jones

I was born into and raised in another faith tradition. I married my high school sweetheart, John, who is a lifelong Methodist.

We have been married for 28 years. We have 3 children, all born, raised and confirmed here at Pell City FUMC.

Shortly after our marriage, we moved to Pell City for John’s career. We visited Pell City FUMC for the first time in 1997. We officially became members in 1999. While I appreciate many things about the denomination I was raised in, it was the UMC where I experienced the most spiritual growth. I learned about the 3 types of Grace in Methodist Theology: Prevenient Grace which is God’s active presence in people’s lives before they even sense the divine at work in their lives; Justifying Grace, through which all sins are forgiven by God; and Sanctifying Grace, which allows people to grow in their ability to live like Jesus.

When I joined this church, I took a membership vow just like you. I take my vows seriously. In those vows, I promised to support

this church and all UMC churches with my prayers, presence, gifts, service and my witness to the world. If at any time I cannot keep my vows, it is my obligation to find another place where I can keep them without trying to destroy my current denomination on the way out.

I am what our denomination calls a “centrist.” That means I stand in the center. I agree with the conservatives on some issues, I partially agree on some issues and I disagree on some issues. I agree with the progressives on some issues, I partially agree on some and I disagree on others. I believe standing in the middle is faithful to our Methodist heritage. I believe it is a very Wesleyan thing to do. I am also what is called a “compatibilist.” This means that everyone in my denomination or church does not have to agree with me for me to be in fellowship with them. I believe that is also part of our heritage as a United Methodist. *Being in Bible studies and small groups with people of different viewpoints of scripture has helped me challenge my own interpretations of that scripture and helped me dig deeper and grow in my faith. Isn’t that what we are supposed to do for each other as a church family?*

God has used the United Methodist Church and the people in it to transform my heart, my head and my actions to be more like Jesus. No denomination is perfect, but I love this one. It has been wrong on issues before. *Methodists were wrong about slavery, wrong about women in ministry. They changed their position on those issues just as John Wesley did. That is part of that Sanctifying Grace. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, He changes our hearts and minds. That is not unbiblical. I, too, am a Bible believing follower of Jesus. I believe in the authority of scripture. You don’t have to be only Conservative to believe in the authority of Scripture.*

All of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were always trying to trip him up. He made them **uncomfortable**. Sometimes Jesus’ commands make me uncomfortable, too. Love your enemies? Do good to those who try to harm you. Turn the other cheek. Love is HARD. Hate is easy. But love is our Greatest Commandment. *We cannot put limits on who God loves and is calling to His church because we are uncomfortable.* The Bible is full of stories about Jesus loving and including those who have been discarded by society and religious leaders of the time. After all, it was the “church” people who hated him and nailed him to the cross. They refused to accept His radical love for those they hated.

I have read things from trusted Biblical scholars regarding the issue of homosexuality. I understand where they are coming from. We have always contextualized scripture. It is not just on this issue.

Just because we make room for something does not mean we have to endorse the fringe edges of it. We don’t endorse the fringe edges of heterosexuality, so why would we here?

God’s prevenient grace draws people in. It is supposed to draw them to the church. The church is supposed to be the agent of connection, pointing people to God. We are not an agent of conviction. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. I just do not want to be a person who stands in the way of anyone coming into God’s family. That is why I want to stay in the United Methodist Church. ♥



Kyle Shelton

My faith was born with Pell City First United Methodist Church, but the seed was planted by my father. *Before I started attending PC FUMC I was an atheist. I had spent my life, from about the age of fifteen, not only not believing in God, but also*

persecuting Christians wherever I found them. At my worst, I stood in pastures during lightning storms and dared God to strike me dead with lightning. I argued with street preachers over their ignorance and their faith in this God. Did they also believe in the Easter Bunny? Santa Claus, I would ask? I invited Jehovah's Witnesses into my house and offered them beer and laughed at their fear-mongering Watch Tower. Belief in God and Christianity, which caused more death than it prevented, was the last refuge of the ignorant and superstitious, I thought.

Then, when I turned 21, my dad spoke to me about hopelessness, the love of God, and the Savior that he had found in Christ Jesus. He walked me through his life as an orphan, as a drug addict, and as an alcoholic, but told me over and over how Jesus had saved his life. He believed with the faith of a child. Twenty years later, he had passed on. My mother, who made me go to the Church I didn't believe in, had passed on, and my wife had died. I began to search for the hope of God. Before, I was searching for a God of punishment, where people were stoned to death, like in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. I had heard all the punishment I could take. So, instead, I looked for Jesus, who loved me, showed me compassion, and led me to be a better disciple for love.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. Love God above all else. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said that to me even as he spoke it to his disciples. My father had told me the same thing many years earlier. The greatest commandment is love.

We talk of love, but turn our backs on those who are different from us (but the greatest of these is love). We divide each other and spew vile rhetoric on our own

neighbors because we don't believe the same things (but the greatest of these is love). We call out others by name and judge them, which is not our job (but the greatest of these is love). My father told me to love God with all my heart and to love my neighbor (even if they were my enemy) with all my heart. My father, Christ Jesus, said the same thing. I am not here to judge. I am here to love. We are all here to love. Love ourselves, love each other, and love God.

When my father died, I wondered if he would go to heaven or hell. Would he go to heaven because he had led others to be disciples of Jesus Christ? Or would he burn in hell because he was gay and in a loving relationship with another man. I believe he is in heaven because we are called to bring others to Christ, not to judge others. *I will choose to stay in the UMC because love is all I have ever known here. Doing anything else would be counter to the foundation I have built my faith on.*♥



Savannah Lee

Currently our church is going through a discernment process. This is to try and figure out where our church should go in the future in terms of denominations. There have been many discussions as to what we should do, but I think that we should stay United Methodist. By choosing to leave, there are a lot of unknowns as to what we will become. By staying United Methodist, we know our core values will still be upheld compared to what might happen if we leave the Church. *I also think that inclusivity is essential. Everyone should be welcome in our church. Some might argue that nothing keeps anyone from attending our church, but it is hard to feel welcome in a place that has voted to leave a denomination because of who you are.* In order to

include everyone, everyone must be allowed to be a part of all positions and leadership roles in the church. By staying UMC, inclusivity will become a reality in our church, and that is something that everyone needs.♥

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. Psalm 139:13-14



Amelia Sims

I am a retired United Methodist pastor in the North Alabama Conference. I am a member of the Pell City First United Methodist Charge Conference. I will also stay United Methodist for many reasons but I wanted to share the three most significant ones.

The number one reason that I am United Methodist is because of grace. I find that I experience grace in the UMC the most around the communion table. Because of our understanding that God's grace is for everyone and one can experience God's grace and forgiveness in receiving communion, we have an open table. Anyone can receive communion. You don't have to be Christian or have "right beliefs" to receive this gift of grace. I have attended other churches in which I felt like an outsider because I was denied access to receiving communion.

My father, Earl Gossett, whom some of you might know as a professor of religion and philosophy for many years at Birmingham-Southern College, was quite influential in my UMC heritage. My dad grew up in the Methodist Church. He was a member of Huffman Methodist when he joined the Annual

Conference as a pastor. Although his own spiritual journey has led him along a different path, he has played a big part in my own UMC faith. Even as a child around the dinner table, we would have discussions as a family about God, faith, what we believed, and what we understood about Jesus and the church. My dad never told me what to believe. He wanted me to think for myself. So, he was always asking questions, challenging my opinions, countering my statements with contrasting points of view.

I have found over the years that the United Methodist Church does the same and that's the second reason. *I don't have to think like you, believe like you or understand like you. In fact, when we come together and talk, pray, study and eat together we often come away with a new viewpoint, a unique way of understanding ourselves and the world. We don't have to agree. And that is so beautiful and inspiring.* I can also boast that not only did my Dad influence me, he also influenced countless UMC pastors, leaders, teachers and peers who also helped me to grow in my own faith and understanding as a United Methodist. The UMC allows me to disagree in particulars with other believers and yet join them in the table of fellowship, worship and sacrament.

While serving churches, I have often spent time in conversation - sometimes intense- around issues and beliefs that I am not in line with but support the fact that everyone has the right to express their opinions. I have never expected a congregation to fall in line with my own convictions. Certainly, my convictions have come through in my preaching. However, I always preach from scripture with grace and love.

Finally, as a pastor I have also benefited from the itinerant system. I have always been guaranteed an appointment each June. At one point, I actually took a part-time appointment for 9 months but that

ended up to be a blessing. I know of non-UMC clergy women who graduated seminary with me that waited 18 months or more to be called to a church. Yes, there are problems with the system but overall the benefit is in favor of clergywomen and clergy couples.

I can also attest to the connectional aspect of the UMC, the support of world-wide missions, our apportionment obligations that help even the smallest churches to be a part of something much larger than themselves, the wonderful heritage of music passed down to us from the Wesleys, and the support of women in leadership - both clergy and laity. I could go on and on about what I like about the UMC. Hopefully, something in what I have shared will resonate with you and your own United Methodist faith.♥



Ed Sims

I love the United Methodist Church. I was raised United Methodist (at least after the 8th grade when they “united”), and I intend to stay in the UMC.

I love the UMC's traditional focus on Grace that points to God's active and unconditional love of us, as opposed to a God of judgment and condemnation (i.e., “get right or go to hell.”) Wesley did an awesome job of analyzing God's Grace: Prevenient, Convicting, Justifying and Sanctifying... it is this Grace that leads us on to Christian maturity as we become more and more motivated by Love.

I love the UMC's focus on “Love God/Love Others” as two sides of a coin that cannot be separated.

I love that the UMC is “scripture driven” but ...

- *scripture taken as a whole, letting passages rub up against one another as we seek to understand God.*
- *scripture in balance with our understanding.*

I love that the UMC does not ask me to park my brain at the door.

I love the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. It guides my faith, and I understand it not as a “should” but an “is.” Scripture simply cannot be understood outside our tradition, without the focus of our reason, or in the absence of our own personal salvation experience.

I love the “Open Table” and the “Open Roll” of the UMC. Our two sacraments are defined by the action of prevenient grace... allowing a non-believer access to a salvation experience conveyed in open communion, and allowing God's grace to shape a child's life within the claim made at infant baptism.

I love the diversity and tolerance of the UMC. Wesley said, in essentials, unity; in all other matters, tolerance. That was incredible wisdom. Our diversity means we argue a lot, but we are much more robust as a family of faith because love binds us together even in our disagreements. We are made stronger by not walking away from one another but by staying in dialogue with one another and trusting God to lead us forward.

I even appreciate the “Trust Clause” in our denomination. I appreciate it because we are a contentious people. The trust clause means that a simple majority can't decide to sell the church building just because we disagree on the color the carpets should be.

I love that we are a connectional church. There is tremendous power in our unity. We can accomplish far more together than we can individually.

I love the appointive process. People who lift up the “call system” often overlook the high pastoral turnover rate in “call system” denominations. They see the few very long pastorates and assume that is the norm. It isn't. I have seen a renewed commitment to longer pastorates in the UMC, which had for a time suffered

under the systemic pressure of retirement that emerged from the post-WWII church. *(By the way, it was the societal mobility of post war America that began the decline in many congregations, especially small rural ones.)*

I believe that the consultation process of appointment really does strive to match the gifts of the pastors with the needs of the congregations. To say otherwise is simply untrue. Everyone has experienced a pastor that they just didn't like, but the appointment system gives a process of managed change. It only works as well as the self-awareness of a congregation. I know one church who told their District Superintendent they wanted a pastor with a good sense of humor. They got it, but unfortunately not much else!

I love that the UMC is representative and democratic in structure. This is not surprising since the Methodist Church grew up at the same time our federal government was being formed. It captures the same positives and negatives of our national governance. One of my seminary professors once said, "it is the worst polity in the world... except for all the others."

I love that the UMC is committed to social justice. It is prophetic in structure and function. Again, I believe that our strength is in our living out of God's Grace.

There are those who point to the decline in church attendance and attribute it to deteriorating morals. I suspect it has to do more with an increased awareness of hypocrisy stemming from self-centered judgmentalism. There are also those who point to an increase in evangelical congregations, especially mega-churches. How much of that increase is due to changing hearts and lives and how much to sheep stealing in a shrinking herd?

So what is my critique of what I

have heard so far about the WCA/GMC? They say it's not about the "hot button issues" but that's all they talk about.

They say it's about the authority of scripture, but:

- > It's really about the authority of a particular interpretation of particular scriptures. In other words, no gays, but cotton blend clothing is ok. It is ok to play fast and loose with the words and deeds of Jesus while insisting on "literal interpretation" of handpicked scriptures.
- > It is not so much the authority of scripture as an authoritarian approach to doctrine and polity with an emphasis on conformity, judgmentalism, and punishment disguised as accountability.

The GMC's main tactic appears to be generating fear. They seem to misunderstand the denominational structure of the UMC and how it was shaped by history... in particular the presence of geographic Jurisdictions (for example, that Jurisdictions were put in place largely to protect Southern bigotry in the post-slavery era).

All the examples of "outrageous" words and actions that were presented [by GMC] were from the Western Jurisdictions. Used as a justification for disaffiliation, this is equivalent to saying, "I disagree with what they are doing in California, so I think Alabama should secede from the Union." The one exception to the Western jurisdiction examples in our recent presentation was the clip of LGBTQ students at Duke University, which was presented as representative of the position of the UMC as a whole. It is not. It was simply another example of fear-mongering.

The use of statistics in the WCA/GMC presentation was misleading, making it look like everyone is leaving the UMC. "500+ churches in Texas are leaving... that's nearly as many as our whole Conference!" However, 500 out of how many? Also, the

Texas Conference is much bigger than the North Alabama Conference to begin with. *Regardless, it is like my mother used to say, "if everyone else is jumping off a bridge, does that mean you should do it too?"*

The statement was made, "the only reason a pastor would "stay UMC" is to change the Discipline [to accept homosexuality]." This is frankly insulting, as I hope I have shown in the reasons I find my home in the UMC.

Here are some things to consider: The WCA/GMC will result in systemic change.

They say "we will accept women clergy" but this is highly unlikely in a modified call system. A church would have to specifically request a woman pastor. The truth is that you will see an intense suppression of both women and minorities in pastoral leadership.

They say "we will abolish boards and agencies to save tons of money." This reveals a profound ignorance of what boards and agencies do and why they are important. They are the means for including local churches (sometimes kicking and screaming) into Social Justice issues. The truth is that we will see an intense decrease in Social Justice advocacy in WCA/GMC congregations.

They say "we will have more control over where our missions giving goes." Again, we will see Social Justice drastically diminished. Further, it may feel like an individual local church is doing more, but in fact they will have sacrificed the power of unified mission as a denomination.

They say "we can still give to UMCOR." But why would you if you don't believe in the UMC message?

Another result will be the concentration of power in the hands of a few. My understanding is that only pastors serving a congregation will have a vote in denominational matters. That means that laity, retired clergy, local pastors, and clergy not under appointment will be disenfranchised.

The bottom line is the WCA/GMC wants property and money. In the past, disgruntled members have broken away and just started their own denominations (Nazarenes, Bible Methodists, Pentecostals, etc.). The difference here is that the WCA/GMC wants the divorce and they want the property and assets as well.

I haven't said anything yet about the LGBTQ issues. Here's my own beliefs:

- It's not a choice.
- It's not a lifestyle.
- It's not contagious.
- It's not predatory.

Instead, it appears that God has created some people differently. *I don't understand why. But then again, there's a lot that I don't understand about what God does and doesn't do. Research is not conclusive, but it is compelling that some people are just born LGBTQ. My job is not to judge or to make people conform to my own moral beliefs, but to love. In the end, that is what Jesus calls us to do.* ♥

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32.



Martha Jenkins

We bought a house on the Lake in 2013 and for a year or more, we drove back to Vestavia every Sunday. Then we checked out Chapel in the Pines, a ministry of Pell City First United Methodist Church. We chose PCFUMC because we saw their commitment to serving the community in so many ways. We served where we could, Bob on the

board of Chapel. I served a year or so on the Finance Committee. I also served in the Congregational Care Ministry, visiting those in need and taking Communion to them. At our ages now, we can't physically do a lot, but we expected to be a part of a loving, accepting church community to the end of our lives.

Though we became aware of some controversy in the General Church, I believed and still believe that the local church will always have a say on pastoral assignments. I have, until recently, tried to avoid getting involved in the controversy. I was emailed a group of videos. I watched part of the first one and realized I wanted no part of them. I believe the new Global Methodist Church engaged in proselytizing and fear mongering.

I was sick when the Admin Council, in a public meeting where only council members could speak, put forth a RESOLUTION and persisted in voting and passing that resolution even though some members said they were clearly out of order. *I knew then that there was a movement to disaffiliate before the discernment process was in place and without giving voice to those who did not want the church to disaffiliate.*

After going through the isolation of Covid we were subjected to months of talk about discernment and disaffiliation and a hymn or two each week. Then they brought in speakers from outside. The articulate young woman from the Bishop's Counsel gave a compelling short presentation encouraging Stay UMC. The speaker from Global was awful. I didn't like his negative message about the UMC. He loudly went on and on with no regard for his allotted time to speak. It was painful to listen. On a different date, there was a speaker from the Free Methodists who gave information in a pleasant informative way without trying to sell us anything. Then there was a man on Zoom who gave a boring slide presentation on going Independent.

All this division is hurting our testimony in this community. We will emerge smaller and weaker when the dust settles. That is particularly painful for those of us who are experiencing old age and its infirmities and are unable to help pick up the pieces. ♥



Kaye Cloud

I am a cradle Methodist. I even graduated from a Methodist university. In my young 20's I was not active in church. When Bill and I began our family, bringing them up in the church was a priority. To continue in my Methodist tradition was an easy choice. The core beliefs that were there for me as a child were there for my children and are still here for me today.

I've read that some feel that the Methodist church is becoming too cultural. I'm not a theologian, but isn't feeding the hungry, caring for the less fortunate and the sick Biblical? During our boys' formative years and well into their adulthood, Bill instilled in them the importance of empathy, which is having the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It's not up to us to be judgmental, but to be empathetic and loving.

God's love and grace is for everyone. ♥



Deborah Mattison

I love my church and the people in it. I love the choir, our open communion and our numerous church missions. I am grateful for the way we care for others in and out of our community and how we continually endeavor to spread Jesus's message of love and hope.

I especially love the United Methodist Church's concept and practice of Grace. When my husband, Ronnie, and I joined this Church twenty years ago, we

immediately found many wonderful people with whom we laughed, prayed, learned and worshiped. As the years went by, our church missions dramatically increased, as did our relationships with God and each other. I learned how to be a stronger Christian, how to trust more in God and how to more fully love others. I increased my understanding of the different types of Grace; and this understanding transformed my life. I believe that I am not alone in my love for my UMC, as over the past twenty years, others have shared how this church has sustained them in many ways.

I love this church because we have always been a diverse group of members who are united in our love of God and in our desire to follow Jesus. Worshiping with others who may not share our viewpoints enables us to grow in various ways, including in our understanding of and compassion for others. Indeed, without exposure to a diversity of opinions, one has little opportunity to challenge his or her own beliefs—and that can inhibit spiritual growth. So while it may sound cliché to say that we are stronger together, it is true. Some of the ideas of others, we may reject. But some mold our beliefs, making them more consistent with how Jesus wants us to live as Christians. Likewise, by better understanding people with whom we disagree, we are forced to more clearly see them as God’s creatures, who are just as worthy of His love as we are. Ultimately, this helps us keep God’s second commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I want to stay United Methodist because it encourages me to study hard and listen thoughtfully to discern God’s Word. God gave each of us a brain and He wants us to use it. There can be no real dispute that biblical scholars who love God, have different interpretations of the Bible—including about human sexuality. I am especially mindful of the fact that while Jesus said much about many topics, he never said

anything about committed same sex relationships. And, given what Jesus did not say, I am loath to interpret some of Jesus’s teachings as implicitly condemning same sex relationships. Rather, *my interpretation of God’s Word is that the most important thing we must do is love God with all of our hearts. And, the second thing we must do is love our neighbors as ourselves. This theme is consistently shown through Jesus’s parables and directives.* Jesus demonstrated this kind of love by intentionally surrounding himself with those who were the most unloved. While none of us can claim to know God’s will for certain, if I have a choice between casting out certain people as unworthy, versus accepting their worthiness, *I choose acceptance and love. I am choosing to stay UMC. I hope that you will stay with me.* ♥

For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12



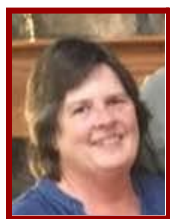
Jim Starnes

I grew up in Highlands United Methodist Church in Birmingham but drifted away in my teen years in the 1960’s. I thought the church was hypocritical and uninterested in matters important to society. Then, in 1991, I walked into Trinity UMC in Homewood after watching a message on TV talking about “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.” I have been a United Methodist ever since; first at Trinity and for the last 12 years at Pell City FUMC. As a United Methodist, I have been a part of mission trips, disaster relief teams, Disciple Bible Study, and many other impactful ministries.

I feel strongly that PCFUMC should remain a part of the United Methodist Church. Our church is a wonderful place and I see no need to change who and what we are. *The UMC has not, is not, and will not force an unwelcome minister on our congregation or force us to host same-sex weddings. Whether First UMC ever has a gay minister or hosts a same-sex wedding will be because the congregation desires such.* The language in the Book of Discipline dealing with these issues has not been changed and will only be changed by a vote at General Conference. There is absolutely no good reason for our congregation to leave the UMC at this time.

However, there are many reasons NOT to leave the UMC. The “infrastructure” provided by agencies and affiliates cannot be replaced by another denomination or by being independent. Our congregation will lose the outstanding seminaries that provide our gifted pastors; the worldwide missionary presence provided by the General Board of Global Ministries; the people, supplies and money provided by the United Methodist Committee on Relief; the fantastic work done by the Board of Church and Society; and the mission opportunities provided by United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, just to name a few. The “connection” to other congregations is also very important. Our church does not need to be isolated. Our church needs to Stay UMC. ♥

But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. James 3: 8-10



Judy Hicks

I have been happy as a United Methodist. I didn't know until recently, when others pointed it out to me, that I was supposed to be unhappy and angry. *I thought our church was doing the work of our Lord. That we were helping to meet the needs of others. I thought our fellowship was good. I enjoyed our work and our play together.*

We have different opinions about things, but we respect each other's opinions, even though we might not agree. I believe that makes me stronger. I believe there is a place for all in the United Methodist Church, for the traditionalist, the centrist, and the progressive. I believe we are stronger together.

I hear rumors. *People do not want a gay minister.* People are afraid, but we have nothing to fear. The wishes of the Congregation will be honored. *People don't want a gay person teaching our children.* People are afraid, but we have nothing to fear. We choose our own children's director and staff. We have Safe Sanctuary policies in place and we train our member volunteers in Safe Sanctuary practices to ensure that predators, heterosexual or other, do not have opportunities to harm our children or vulnerable adults. These rumors are fear tactics.

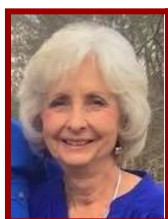
Some say *Methodist ministers don't believe the Bible*, but I have not heard anything that was not Biblical from our ministers.

Some say *the congregation doesn't own our property* and this upsets them. I thought this was a nonissue for me, but the more I learn about the trust, I believe it is in the best interest of God's church.

My heart is hurting and I am so sad. Like so many others, I have had sleepless nights. But I believe the Bible teaches me that it is not my place to judge others. I may be wrong and I am ok with being wrong because I would rather err

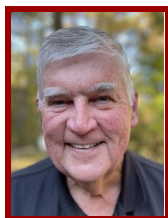
on the side of love and grace. I love the people of this Church. This Church is my home. Thank you, Lord, for loving me, whether I am right or wrong. Thank you, Jesus, for being my savior. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for giving me peace.♥

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 1 John 4:18



Myra Galloway

I have spent much time in prayer and feel led to voice my beliefs. I feel that God has led me to stay with the United Methodist Church. I have been a member in two other denominations, one as a child through teenage years and was always loved and accepted in that church. When I became an adult, I chose to go with my husband to the church of his choice. I never felt comfortable in that church. I was always the outsider. The church was very judgmental. They did not believe in equal rights for women, the needy, widows, or anyone that did not fit their preconceived profile. I remained an active member in that church until it became so very harsh that we began to visit the UMC and eventually joined. The United Methodist Church has an organized structure, is open to all, and accepting of everyone. I do not ever wish to take part in a group that takes it upon themselves to decide who will be accepted equally with no exceptions.



Bob Barnett

"Hello, my name is Bob, and I am prejudiced."

You have to recognize and admit your faults before you can correct them. Just like the people at AA, I have an

excuse. I was raised to be prejudiced. *I grew up in rural Alabama where there were only two churches, two races, and two sexes in the town.* You were either Baptist or Methodist, Black or White, Boy or Girl; there were no other options. The Baptists and Methodists didn't trust each other, and they certainly weren't going to have anything to do with those other pagan religions. The black and white people just knew their places. The bearded women were in carnivals or freak shows.

I remember Sunday School teachers and our preacher expounding on the pagans that went to the Catholic Church. I don't know how they knew much about them because I think there were only two Catholic churches in the entire county. They were people to be feared. They prayed to strange gods. They couldn't even pray directly to God. I was certain that you could identify any Catholic by the horns growing out of their head. I had never been able to identify one until I went to the University of Alabama. I made several good friends my first semester. And then this great friend dropped the "C" word! He was Catholic! Oh my! I had known this guy for a while. We met at Boy's State. We were in classes together and he was a sharp guy. I had yet to see him bow down and worship a strange God. He was just like me! What was up with this? Had my church teachers taught me wrong? They were so sincere in their teachings; how could they be so wrong? I lost a lot of my religious beliefs that day. It would be a long time before I was willing to deal with any religion again. Over the past few years, I got to know several of the Sisters at St. Vincent's very well. I can tell you without a doubt that they are some of the most caring and wonderful people I have ever known in my life.

The people who taught me these things have long since passed on to a different place. *I wish I could tell them, and any other person who*

influences children, that it is absolutely wrong to view anyone as a bad person because they don't go to the same church that you attended.

Our closest next-door neighbor when I was growing up was a black family: Step, Rosie, and their son Dewey. Dewey was a couple of years older than me. We played together a lot when we were young. I had more toys than he did but that wasn't saying much. We had a nicer house: we had 5 rooms; they had 3. We both had outhouses. We had water inside the house when the well wasn't dry; They had to get water with a bucket and a rope. But they never had a dry well, so we had to get water from them when ours was dry. After I started school, Dewey and I didn't play a lot together.

I will never forget Step cutting our grass. We mostly had a raked yard without grass. No one had lawnmowers so when your grass needed to be cut you got out the sling blade and went to work. Dad was a truck driver and gone most of the time. We were living with my grandmother, and she hired Step to cut the grass. We were told to stay away because he couldn't hear well and would cut our heads off with the sling blade.

My grandmother would yell really loud at him and give him some ice water every hour or so out of a fruit jar instead of a glass. I didn't know why she did that. I just figured you could put more water in a fruit jar, and she didn't want to run the risk of having one of her glasses broken. At the end of the day, she told me to take the jar down to the trash pile and break it. That was really strange, but great at the same time. When you are a kid, it is lots of fun to break glass. But fruit jars were a valuable commodity that were used year after year for canning food. So why did she want me to break it? It was because that "N..... Man" had drunk out of it and it could never be clean again. I remember even at that age that it just didn't seem right.

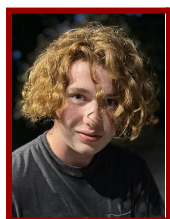
The church I went to had Deacons with guns at the entrance to the church to keep black people from entering. That probably set the tone for many years. I went to a pre-integration high school with only white kids. There were black students at the University of Alabama when I started in 1964 but I never saw one on campus. Even the football team was all white until 1971, two years after I left. My first experience with black people as equals was in my professional career. I worked with several black architects over the years and served on several boards with black people. Some of the best professional advice I ever got was from Ken Owens, a black architect in Birmingham. I loved working with him. My next-door neighbor at the Hundred Acre Woods has to be one of the finest men I have ever known. There are two black board members I work with that have a strong commitment to improve the world for everyone. I wish more people were like them. I don't know why anyone would break a glass after they drank from it. *I will admit it has been a struggle to get past my racism. I hope to God I am past it. I want to judge people on their ability and their commitment to making the world a better place and never think about the color of their skin.*

OK, I have to admit I was homophobic. I grew up drooling about girls and women. The thought of having a relationship with someone of the same sex was totally disgusting to me. I had to work with a few gay interior designers. They were OK as long as they kept their distance. I thought they did good work and hired a couple to do some work on personal projects, but that was the limit. I would laugh about them behind their backs with the rest of the design team. It was pretty much a cultural thing in the construction industry where big ole mean construction guys made comments about anyone different from them. I certainly didn't want to

go against the group to protect some poor soul!

Then one day my two sons announced they were "GAY." My whole world was rocked. What did I do wrong? Did they need psychological help? I didn't sleep for days. Then I just refused to accept it. With a wife dealing with terminal cancer and two gay sons, it was the toughest time of my life. Many times I went to the front of the church, knelt down and prayed for God to fix things. I felt like the world had come to an end. God never turned on a light bulb for me to give me instant clarity. Instead, it was like a tiny ember that started to burn and created a fire over many months. As I spent time with my sons and their friends, I slowly realized they were all good people. They cared about each other and their families. *I realized that being gay wasn't a choice: you are born that way. God finally made me realize that he created them that way and I shouldn't question his work.* As I became more accepting of their lives and embraced them, I realized several things. There is no way someone wakes up one morning and says, "I want to be gay." The pressure from family and society is too overwhelming. Many gay people are rejected by their families, society, and churches. I have friends whose families have disowned them and have nothing to do with their own children. I can't imagine how painful that must be. You don't make the decision to tell people you are gay lightly. There is just too much prejudice against them. It is truly amazing how many people tell me their brother, sister, or cousin is gay. We have met gay couples in many different places. Most are standoffish until I say something about having gay sons. After that they open up and accept me as a friend. It is terrible that they can't be open to everyone. One couple we know just celebrated forty years together. That is pretty amazing for any couple!

I think to some extent everyone has prejudice. It isn't right to go about hating people for the color of their skin, the religion they practice, the way they wear their pants, or thousands of other things. *We need to get over our prejudice and become better people. We all need to love and respect each other.* ♥



Jenner Golden

This church has been a place where we can hang out with other youth, eat dinner together, and serve together on mission trips. *After all these years, why would we go through all the trouble to change the church that the youth have grown up in and love just to single out and exclude people?* And not even because they are doing something harmful, but because of who they are. The whole point of discernment is to converse and consider. Jesus and God definitely would at least want to hear our voices. The Bible says all people are created in God's image, all people, not just the people who aren't gay. ♥



Sally Smith

How very important Pell City First United Methodist and her people have been in my life! Alongside my family they loved and challenged me. We grieved deaths, celebrated life, worked, taught, disagreed, cried, laughed, sang, prayed, and learned together. I am forever indebted to the people of PCFUMC for helping me grow in Christian love and fellowship. I hope she continues changing lives and making disciples of Christ for a very long time.

Spending most of my life as a UM member and here at PCFUMC since 1985, I was always taught about a Loving God, "...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." is, for me, a hopeful prayer that one day all

of us on earth will love like God—on earth as it is in heaven—not some apocalyptic warning that only "the good" would rise up to be with God.

My understanding of hell is separation from God in any form it takes, not some flaming place where my soul will be tortured for eternity. You may have a different understanding and that is ok, let's discuss and learn from each other! Doubt and questioning can be a path to growth and understanding, and has been an important aspect of PCFUMC. If you have answers to all you are seeking, and give more weight to the "shall nots" in the Bible, maybe another denomination would appeal to you more. There are plenty of other denominations on most corners in Pell City that adhere to more rigid interpretations of the Bible, and believe that they know The Truth. The Bible written by God, Amen, where judgment and condemnation are justified, and the threat of Hell seems to help folks believe that truth.

In the past, when I felt that the loud voices of church friends around me were speaking things I couldn't accept, I quietly stepped away from active participation. I thought it wasn't my place to try to change other people's views, and division seemed too high a cost for me. Maybe I was wrong, and it is my responsibility to seek changes to hearts and minds, yet, I still think dividing the church is too high a cost.

We need to remember that the 2000 year-old Christian history has not always been righteous. Good Christian people, guided by what they believed were biblical truths ... took Native children from their homes; denied women and blacks full citizenship in this country and in many churches; chose to not get involved in the civil rights movements; denied divorced persons full acceptance—still can't marry, preach, hold leadership positions—in some denominations. *The UMC hasn't always followed the right path, but hopefully it is*

"moving on to perfection" by learning from past mistakes. Isn't that how we grow? Maybe the time has come when we as UM Christians emulate God's love and welcome all into full fellowship with all its rights, privileges and responsibilities. ♥



Kathy Hammond

I moved here from Tennessee, where I was retiring with my husband before he died. We moved from Minot, North Dakota. I grew up in the Methodist Church. It was very conservative. I took my faith very seriously at a very young age, but I did have a hard time understanding why some things were considered Christian, which I questioned. As I grew up I realized that Biblical context and culture is very important to me when I study scripture. I also realized that Jesus came to set us free of many restrictions so we can live into the New Kingdom Jesus came to bring us. *What freedom we have in Christ! Freedom to live our lives (by the power of the Holy Spirit) as Jesus showed us.* We are to feed the hungry, care for the orphan, widow, sick, and homeless. We are to love everyone.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the first church faced enormous challenges. Were gentiles really to be admitted into the church without circumcision? Was a eunuch acceptable to God? The list goes on, but the conclusion was clear. God's Holy Spirit also fell upon these people. If God called them acceptable, then they were. I can be no less accepting. God does not call us because of our education, career, race, or sexual orientation (we know that 1 out of 100 babies are born with some sexual anomaly). *God calls us because we are loved and God has a purpose for each of our lives. May we walk in the freedom Christ came to gift us. May we view each person we meet as one Jesus*

loves unconditionally and who has gifts to share.

The word "united" in United Methodist gives us safeguards which I highly value. For example, having church buildings "in trust" keeps one or a few people from running off with a building if they decide they don't like something someone in the church is doing. It gives time for cooler heads to prevail when disagreements arise. It also gives those with special training on particular issues an opportunity to act as mediators. The United Methodists are a very diverse group, which allows checks and balances. It's difficult to be cultish when there are diverse beliefs. I was sexually molested by a minister as a young teen. The greater church structure made it possible for me to come forward and find justice by calling him to accountability. Many denominations do not have such checks in place and it's easier for a perpetrator to slip through the cracks. I truly believe we are better, as members of God's Kingdom, when we are together. ♥



Mike Galloway

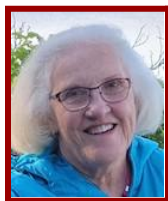
After much prayer and preparation, I am sharing a few thoughts about why I will stay in the United Methodist Church. I

was raised in a large, conservative church denomination and remained in that denomination until I was in my late 40's, increasingly dissatisfied until I chose to leave. In that conservative denomination I saw women deprived of the right to teach and preach, divorced men were not allowed to serve in positions of leadership, divorcees were not allowed to be married in their churches, and people of color were passively rejected for membership. The last straw was when the church where I was a member ran off a new, young pastor because his hair reached his collar and he drove a 10-year-old BMW. Needless to say, the church split.

When we began looking for a new church home, we visited several different denominations. Following a visit to Gadsden First United Methodist Church we were immediately contacted by an Assoc. Pastor who welcomed us with open arms. After a few more visits, reading about the United Methodist Church and its foundational beliefs, we did the unthinkable; we changed denominations! There is no doubt that God led us to make this change, as only two years later we were called to serve as President of the United Methodist Children's Home, serving Alabama and West Florida. From there we were called to serve as President of the United Methodist Children's Home serving Florida. We retired there in 2013.

These positions in the UMC created opportunities to visit about 250 UMC churches in three conferences. *In each of those churches I saw love, diversity, connectional ministries, commitment to UMC foundational beliefs, commitment to UMC extension ministries, such as the Children's Homes, UMCOR, Men's and Women's ministries and appointment of pastors of various genders, races, cultures and languages.* I have worshiped in congregations that spoke Spanish, Korean, Cuban and a variety of dialects.

Finding a new home here at PCUMC was, and is a marvelous experience. PCUMC is a church with Open Doors, Open Hearts, and Open Minds. I cannot imagine my church, PCUMC, leaving the UMC and depriving many members of a welcoming church home. ♥



Mary Ann McMinn

I grew up in a very conservative religious environment. I readily accepted the

historical positions of my church concerning the role of women in church leadership, drinking, dancing, divorce, etc. based on the

interpretations of the Bible as they were taught to me. Since I have joined the UMC, I have come to appreciate that I don't agree with all of these interpretations that I had previously been taught. I believe that Jesus teaches us to love others and to allow Him to judge others; therefore, I plan to remain in the UMC. ♥



Addie Jones

It's easy to say what I think, but it's harder to listen

It's easy to stand on the side and avoid all the trenches

But how we gonna love our enemies

When we can't even love our friends?

We build walls, but we're called

To build bridges instead

The devil is crafty and we fall right into his trap

We might not be swingin' our fists,

but we'll talk behind somebody's back

How're we gonna look like Jesus

when

We're only lookin' out for ourselves?

Real love is givin' our lives for somebody else

These are lyrics to a song I heard recently called "Love Is Everything We Need" by Unspoken. It got me thinking about our church's current issue. It seems that we have forgotten the mission of the church. I grew up in this church, was baptized and confirmed here. This church is where I was taught the love of Jesus. He loves everyone unconditionally. He put everyone first when he died on the cross.

The other night, in my youth group, we discussed the story of The Good Samaritan. In the story a man is left for dead on the side of the road. He is passed by a priest and a temple worker but they were afraid to break church rules and become "unclean" so they went on down the road without showing any compassion to the man. Eventually,

a Samaritan came down the road and took pity on the wounded man. He bandaged the man, cleaned him off, and paid for his stay at an inn. The Samaritan saw the man as another human being in need of love. The Samaritans were viewed as a group of people who were among the most hated of that time by the Jews. They were considered an abomination to God. The point of the parable is that Jesus himself was the Samaritan in the story showing extravagant love for everyone.

To me, I believe that no matter who you are, where you come from, or what you have been through, we are all equal and loved through the eyes of Jesus. These are the things I grew up learning in the United Methodist Church, and that is exactly why I want to stay UMC. ♥



Judy and Dick McGauran

We are sad, disappointed, and heartbroken that our beloved Pell City First United Methodist Church is going to be voting on a recommendation of the Administrative Council on whether to leave our UMC denomination after a 53 year affiliation. This vote will split our church. All of us who are members took an oath to support the UMC when we joined. The most discouraging aspect of this decision is that the reason for this action is a desire to choose discrimination over inclusion.

The vote of the General Conference on changing anything in our Book of Discipline won't be held until October 2024. So, WHY THE URGENCY? Why now?

Our church, which has always been such a beacon in the community of what is right and good and caring, wants to have a vote to choose exclusion. I sincerely ask you to think about *What Would Jesus Do?* That phrase may have become trite through the years but I

think it deserves our thoughtful consideration.

Our Methodist motto has been Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds. Did we mean it?♥

The Fruit of the Spirit is:

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience,

Kindness, Generosity,

Faithfulness, Gentleness,

and Self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23

● *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

● *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

● *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

● *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.*

● *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.*

● *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

● *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.*

● *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

● *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

Matthew 5:3-11
