



Listening Sessions – We heard you!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the two listening sessions on September 17, 2023 and October 1, 2023 and for many who shared their thoughts through other forms of communication. Answers to a number of the questions are provided below but this is only the first step towards ensuring Saint Mark continues to be the church that we know and love.

The Church Council is recommending the formation of two unique task forces for two of the consistent themes from the feedback.

Communication Task Force – we need to improve the way we communicate with each other. This Task Force will be responsible for gathering input from the congregation, creating a plan for thoughtful, timely and effective communication, and presenting an action plan for all to follow.

Vision Fulfillment Task Force – we have a vision and now we need a strategy and action plan to ensure the uniqueness and diversity of Saint Mark is celebrated and visible to all. This Task Force will be responsible for creating a near-term and long-term plan for Saint Mark to be a viable and thriving destination church as well as a place of worship for the growing community around us.

Neither of these will be quick or easy but so critical to the stability and long-term growth of our beloved Saint Mark.

If you would like to be on either of the task forces above, please email **Robert Gilleo** at rgilleo@stmarkumc.org. He will compile the list of those interested. When we gather in the initial Task Force Meeting, as a group, you will determine how to best facilitate and move forward.

Listening Sessions Questions and Answers

Financial Soundness

The financial “soundness” of any church should be shared with its congregants such that surprises do not totally wreck the operation of the church.

In the past, we provided a summary of Saint Mark's financial status. To be more transparent, we will revisit the format used in the previous Remarks and start providing the information again.



Should a member want to discuss Saint Mark's financial statements, please contact the Finance Chair and Vice Chair at finance@stmarkumc.org.

Disaffiliation of The United Methodist Church

Why hasn't the discussion/information shared by Rev. Zant been clearly shared from the pulpit and in our Remarks newsletter?

In several church services, Pastor Carolyn has mentioned the disaffiliation of the United Methodist Church. Pastor Carolyn provided an update after the June conference. For further information, we recommend that you follow this link:

[https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Q%26A The Future Printable+2023.pdf](https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Q%26A%20The%20Future%20Printable+2023.pdf)

Did the Conference know, in April | June, how many Pastors would be displaced? How will clergy who want to leave, but their congregation does not want to leave be handle? Why worried about displaced UMC ministers when few (if not us) other congregations were having that conversation?

The North Georgia United Methodist Conference did not have a firm number on how many pastors were going to be displaced on April/June 2023. As disaffiliation continues, the North Georgia United Methodist Conference will not know how many pastors or churches are staying or leaving until the end of 2023 or until the new year. For the churches staying and the pastors leaving, the Bishop will appoint a new pastor to the church. For the churches leaving and pastors staying, the Bishop will appoint the pastor to another church in the denomination.

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What is going to happen if the UMC does not change its language?_What is the plan for ordaining gay people? Where is the church heading with that?

The 2020 General Conference has been twice delayed and is now set for May 2024. Hundreds of pieces of legislation on all topics relevant to the church and our world are before the United Methodist General Conference for consideration. A range of legislation on this topic will also be before the 2024 General Conference. It is hard to speculate on whether the Book of Discipline will change, and if so, how it will change. Stay informed by subscribing to www.ngumc.org/subscribe.

Departure of Rev Jess Related and Staff

Questions regarding Rev Jess' Departure

There were several questions regarding the departure of Rev Jess answered during the live sessions. We provided as much information to explain the events that led to Rev.



Jess departure as possible without breaking confidentiality. If our explanation did not answer your questions, please submit your email to spr@stmarkumc.org for an appointment to discuss further. You can also contact the Staff Parish Relations (SPR) chairperson, **Lily Berrios** (lilyb@sizemoregroup.com) or SPR vice-chairperson, **Noey Barrera-Disler** (bdfamily99@gmail.com) for an appointment to discuss further.

Youth

Our Youth Room has been emptied for weeks, as members, families leave. How can we reach out to these families to regain their trust?

A group of youth and parents gathered Sunday, Sept 10th, with the goal of having open dialogue about what we want for the youth program going forward. Our youth are talented and busy kids with athletics, school events and work commitments which often limits attendance consistency. As parents and youth, we agreed to commit to show up as often as we can.

We had great participation at the Pride Parade with many of our youth walking with the float. We are scheduling a Lock In and Secret Holiday Gift exchange in the remaining part of 2023.

Some ideas to help with attendance:

1. Plan a 'bring a friend Sunday' when there is a specific curriculum/lunch after service.
2. Include Youth in the service as acolytes, crucifers, communion servers, ushers and scripture readers.
3. Create a Youth Text group to communicate who is able or not able to attend each Sunday.
4. Join the Young Adult class for special events.

Long-Term Members

There have been several long-standing members who have recently left Saint Mark. What are the common themes they have given for their departure? What can we learn from those?

We are forming a Vision Fulfillment Task Force where members of the congregation will work together creating a near-term and long-term plan for Saint Mark to be a viable and thriving destination church as well as a place of worship for the growing community around us. Please reach out to **Robert Gilleo** at rjgilleo@stmarkumc.org if you would like to participate in these important Task Forces.

If you have names of members who are no longer attending Saint Mark, please provide their names and contact information to Pastor Carolyn so that she can reach out to them.



Church Council

Why is the work of the Church Council so secret? Not asking about SPR issues, I know that part is confidential. Especially the finance situation not shared with the congregation. They do not even share their accomplishments.

With the exception of Executive Sessions where personal/HR information is discussed, the meetings are open to the congregation. Information can be found in the meeting notes online as well, including non-personal finance information. We plan to include high-level financial information in the Remarks and the Sunday bulletin in the future.

As for our accomplishments, as all ministries run by lay members fall under the overall umbrella of the Council - we celebrate our many ministries and lay volunteers that rightfully deserve the accolades.

I'm hearing there are some council resignations and others – are reasons being given? How many have resigned? Wonder if the folks who are resigning and leaving are being contacted in any way by anyone. It is also concerning that there is no method of communication from the council when members have concerns. What is Carolyn's response to the injured members who have left committees?

We have had four total resignations from the Council - two Trustees, a Lay Leader, and a Ministries chair. Many reasons were given, and as they were not shared with the Church at large, with respect for those members, we do not think it is best to relay that information. Please feel free to ask those who have resigned their reasons.

Pastor Carolyn has corresponded with some of the individuals who have resigned their position.

Usually, the resignations are mentioned in the next church council which will be on the church council's minutes. The church is working on written procedures on how to communicate to the congregation when a church council member resigns.

Could we publish the agenda and notes after council meetings? Perhaps the agenda ahead? I appreciate the periodic reports from the various committees. Other information as well.

The meeting notes (the agenda creates the outline for these) of all past meetings are available on the Church website. Unless there is a Called Council meeting to discuss a specific topic, the agenda remains largely the same throughout the year. We will work on updating on a timelier basis.