

*This is the original document that I sent to members of BSUMC. I have been highlighting a benefit each month in our newsletter. They may not exactly be published in the same order. I wrote this in good faith on why I am drawn to the United Methodist Church. Yes, things aren't perfect. The church isn't perfect. We are imperfect people striving for perfection as John Wesley would say. I made vows at my ordination, and I am holding on to those vows. If you would like to know more, please reach out.*

You asked me what the benefits of staying UMC are. First, I want to say that if you asked different people this same question, you would probably hear different responses because people value different things. But I will tell you what I value in UMC.

1. **Connectionism.** I love that each church is connected with other churches around the world. We do so much good in the world because we have a structure in place to promote mission and ministry locally and worldwide. At my previous church, a Korean couple was traveling and wanted to worship one Sunday morning. They typed "closest UMC" into their GPS and ended up at the church. They told me they knew they would be welcomed at the church because of the connection. We are never truly alone! Another example of the connection is if one of our congregants is away on vacation or work and gets injured, I know I could call another UMC minister to go minister since I am away. This happened to one of my friends when one of her members was in an accident in Florida. She called the district office in Florida, and they were able to send a minister to the hospital so he wouldn't be alone. That is the connection we have as United Methodist.

Also, being connected has direct benefits for the local church. Several grants and funds assist the local church in furthering its ministry. If a local church gets into a financial crunch, there are funds to assist ministerial salaries to help the church get back on its feet. One of my previous churches had a problem with their finances. The Conference paid my salary while the church saved money. This is the connection! It shows that we are not in ministry alone; we are connected worldwide, assisting and encouraging ministry in each local community.

2. **Diversity.** Even though some would say this is a reason to leave, I see it as a strength of the UMC. The confusion that some people have is with

interpretation. The UMC has always been a place where people may interpret things differently than others, but there is a common core that unites us. The UMC is a place where we value our differences and seek to learn together. It is okay for us to feel differently about certain issues, but there is respect and understanding. (I will touch more on this in #3)

We have always been a denomination that connected the head and heart, belief and action, and personal and social holiness since John Wesley's ministry began. John Wesley actually coined the phrase "agree to disagree." He also 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 doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences." Diversity is a strength.

- 3. Our theology.** John Wesley believed that the Christian faith was "revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason." This means we believe in the authority of Scripture, but church tradition, personal experiences, and reason are also tools that help shape our faith and theology. This is where people disagree with the interpretation. Our Book of Discipline states, "*Our standards affirm the Bible as the source of all that is 'necessary' and 'sufficient' unto salvation and 'is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice.'* We properly read Scripture informed by tradition... we interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible... We are aided by scholarly inquiry and personal insight, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Even though we interpret Scripture differently using our traditions, experience, and reason, which causes disagreement on certain issues (mainly social, like women's rights, the death penalty, etc.), there is a core to our faith. That core is unchanged from the beginning and contained in the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith in the Book of Discipline (I will include a link to these documents so you may view our beliefs).

The central theological belief that sets the UMC above others is grace. Through God's grace, we affirm that every person is welcome at the table and may be baptized into the family of Christ. Every person knows the love of God because of grace. It is through grace that we become loving disciples. We believe in translating God's love into action in life. We believe the practices of piety, like prayer, and acts of mercy, compassion and justice for all, are essential to our faith. We embrace the Evangelical

and social Gospels while showing compassion, mercy, and grace in our broken world. We are committed disciples of Jesus Christ, seeking to make disciples to transform the world. We are a church where grace abounds!

4. **Ministers.** The UMC provides pastors for every church. It may not seem like a huge deal, but with a shortage of ministers, finding a well-trained, qualified minister may be challenging. Even though the process of becoming an ordained minister is long and tedious, every congregation knows that every ordained minister is vetted and certified as a well-trained, qualified minister. The UMC believes ministers are life learners, and we believe in educating ministers through seminary and beyond. But we know that ministers are not perfect people, and if there are problems, they are under supervision. There is accountability. Even though some have said there isn't accountability, there are processes that keep clergy and laity accountable, as outlined in the Book of Discipline. Unlike other denominations where it is easy to get ordained and there is a lack of supervision, the UMC takes the call of ordination seriously.

Ministers also itinerate. For me, it takes the focus away from the minister and focuses on the ministry. I know churches that have had a minister for 30+ years. Are they growing? Are they placing the minister on a pedestal? Itinerancy is a God thing. I love the fact that I was sent, not hired, to serve the local congregations on behalf of the larger mission of the church. It really solidifies the larger church and the local community. Other denominations have search committees that search for ministers. That isn't in our DNA as United Methodists. We were founded on itinerant ministry going back to the circuit riders in the 1700s.

5. **The Church's Impact.** As I mentioned in #1, we are a connectional church, and one value is the missions we do together. We have the structure in place to respond to natural disasters when they hit around the world. We also help those struggling through war, poverty, and famine. UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) is sent out on the church's behalf to assist in whatever they need. The UMC has a structure and system that works. We also serve missional needs such as education. The UMC helps with Africa University and other universities in the US, such as Columbia College (which supports women's education), Claflin University (which is a well-known HBCU), Spartanburg Methodist, Wofford, and Duke, just to name a few. We support campus ministries

through Wesley Foundations at colleges to bring students to Christ and to be a home away from home. The UMC has hospitals, community centers, and social services (like Epworth Children's Home in Columbia, where one of our own is currently in leadership, and Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry assisting those with special needs.). There are camps and retreats locally and worldwide where we offer programs that support growth as disciples of Jesus Christ. This includes Lake Junaluska, where I heard my calling for ministry while attending a summer youth camp, and Asbury Hills in South Carolina. All these mission opportunities are possible because of the local church. Each local church works together and has a hand in providing missional needs locally and around the world through our giving.

I could list more, but those are the highlights of what I value in the UMC. There is SO much good about the UMC! Is the UMC perfect? No. We are an imperfect church because we are imperfect people who are always seeking the grace of God. We strive daily to discern our call to further God's Kingdom. Every day, we are the church while showing grace, mercy, love, and compassion as we bring others to know Jesus Christ. I hope this helps you recognize the value of the UMC and the good we do! As always, please let me know if there is anything else I can do! Below are the links to the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/articles-of-religion>

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/confession-of-faith>