Faith and First: Exploring a New Chapter Together

Frequently Asked Questions:

Faith UMC and Fort Smith First UMC Adoption Discernment

April 23, 2025

At Fort Smith First UMC, we believe that God is always calling us forward to deeper faith, greater service, and new opportunities to share Christ's love. Recently, we have been discerning how God is leading us to grow in mission and ministry, and trying out ministry experiments in the eastern part of town. One possibility before us is adopting Faith UMC as our East Campus. This is an idea that invites us to pray, dream, and discern together. As we listen to God's leading, we are considering both the opportunities and the challenges that this adoption would bring, knowing that the goal is not to preserve a building but to explore new ways to make disciples and serve our community.

Our congregation has been presented an opportunity to broaden our reach, deepen our discipleship, and expand our ministry presence in the River Valley. But it is also a significant decision that requires prayer, careful consideration, and open conversation. Nothing has been decided yet; we are still in a season of discernment.

We know there are questions, and that's a good thing! The purpose of this FAQ is to share what we know so far and to keep us all on the same page as we continue this journey. If you don't see your question here, we want to hear from you because this is a conversation, not a one-time announcement.

Ministry & Mission: Why Are We Considering This?

1. Why is Fort Smith First UMC considering adopting Faith UMC?

As followers of Christ, we are always called to reach new people and serve new communities. For generations, Faith UMC has been a faithful presence on the east side of town, but in recent years, like many churches, they have faced challenges in sustainability. Seeking guidance, Faith UMC entered into a conversation with District Superintendent Roy Beth Kelley, which led to discussions with Fort Smith First UMC about what a shared future might look like.

Both congregations share a rich heritage of mission and ministry, and this adoption is an opportunity to build on that foundation. If we move forward with this adoption, Fort Smith First UMC would seek to expand its ability to reach more people, expand our discipleship opportunities, and strengthen our outreach in the River Valley, particularly the unchurched and dechurched.

This is not about “saving” a church or simply maintaining a building; it is about discerning together whether God is calling us to something new. This would be an asset-based vision—a proactive step forward to expand our footprint and ministry, not a requirement or an act of survival for our part.

2. What is the long-term vision for the East Campus?

If this adoption moves forward, Faith UMC would become a campus of Fort Smith First UMC, fully integrated into our church family, with our identity as one church in multiple locations shaping all future decisions.

The East Campus would be more than just a worship space; it would also be a hub for ministry, discipleship, and outreach. Some ideas being explored include:

- A tuition-based after-school program for elementary and middle school students, which could provide both a meaningful ministry and financial sustainability
- Small groups and discipleship opportunities, tailored to the needs of the East Campus community
- Worship and outreach programs that connect with young families and new residents in the area
- A gathering space for new or emerging ministries, based on community need

We invite members to dream boldly about how this space could be used for mission and ministry.

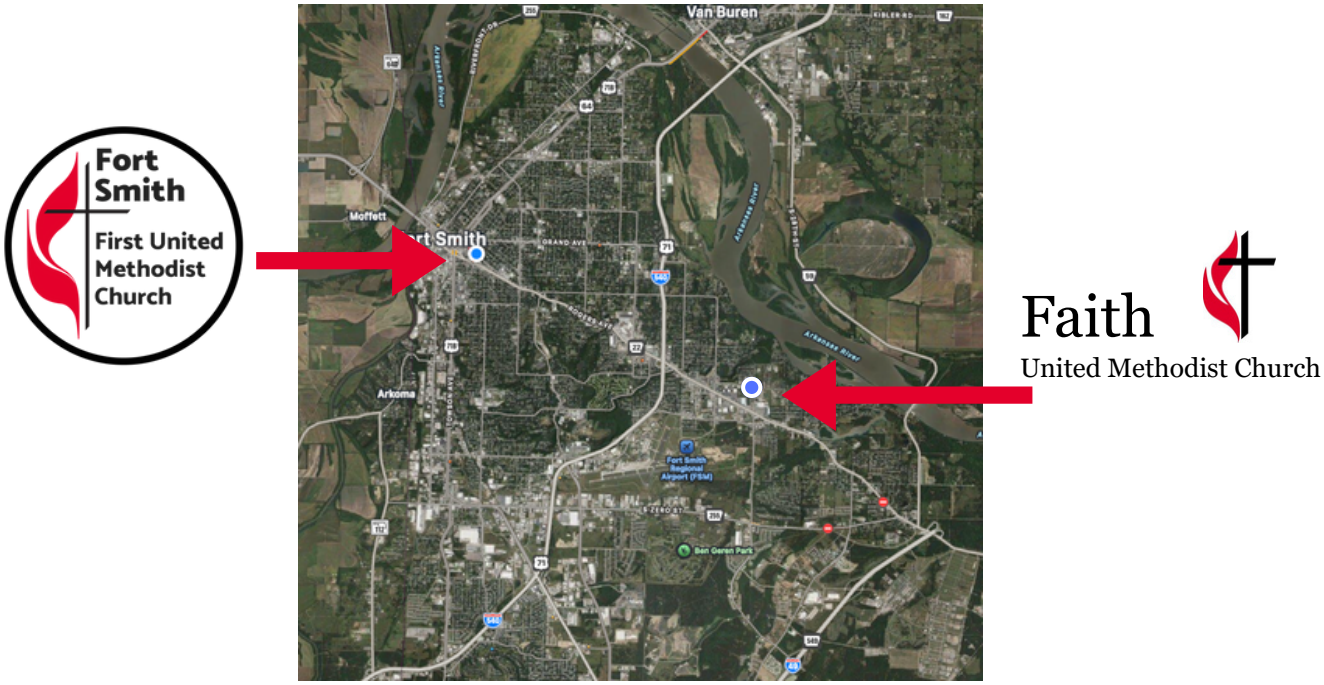
3. What is the difference between a multiple-point charge and a multi-site?

Unlike a multiple-point charge, a multi-site is one congregation in every way, operating in multiple locations while maintaining one vision and one leadership. Maintaining historical building locations provides important neighborhood presence and continuity, at the same time, building bridges of connection to work cooperatively, administratively, programmatically, and financially as parts of a single congregation in two locations.

4. What might the second campus be called?

If this adoption moves forward, one possibility is that the former Faith UMC would be named something like the ‘East Campus’ of Fort Smith First UMC. There has been discussion among Trustees about referring to the sanctuary space as ‘Faith Chapel,’ as a celebration of the congregation’s heritage; though, of course, no decision has been made yet. As we discern, we will invite creative thinking about how best to honor both history and new opportunities.

Worship and Discipleship



5. Would the campus currently known as Faith UMC still have worship?

Yes. If this adoption moves forward, Faith UMC would become the East Campus of Fort Smith First UMC, with a 9:00 AM worship service. The goal is to create a welcoming, Spirit-filled worshipping community that serves both existing members and new families in the area.

Our downtown campus would continue with its existing worship schedule with an 8:30 AM Roebuck Chapel Service, an 11:00 AM Modern Service in the Great Hall, and an 11:00 AM Sanctuary Service. Members from both locations would be encouraged to see themselves as one church family. Some would worship downtown but participate in a small group, discipleship class, or outreach ministry at the East Campus. Others may find a home at the East Campus but still participate in ministries downtown.

The key is that this is not “our church” and “their church.” This is one church, growing into a new chapter.

6. Will Fort Smith First UMC members be encouraged to attend worship or participate in ministries at the East Campus?

As we explore this possibility, it’s important to remember that this is not an alliance of two churches. Instead, it would be as one church living into a new expression. If we move forward, we will be one congregation, worshiping and ministering in two locations. Some members may feel called to make the East Campus their worship home, while others may serve in ministries there while continuing to worship downtown. However we participate, we do so as part of one church family, with one shared mission.

7. What about Congregational Care?

Care for one another is the responsibility of the whole church family. Pastors, staff, and trained congregational care team members will continue to care for members of the congregation, and work with members of the congregation to build, strengthen, and encourage the web of connection that is how we care for one another.

Staffing and Leadership

8. This seems like a lot of work for our staff. How would staffing work between the two campuses?

We are structuring this carefully to ensure that our staff is set up for success and sustainability. While this will take thoughtful planning, we are committed to making sure our pastoral and ministry teams are supported in this process.

Pastors Blake & Abbey would continue leading the downtown worship services as usual. The pastor preaching the 11:00 AM Connections Service downtown would also preach the 9:00 AM service at the East Campus. This would enable us to keep all our existing weekly worship services downtown as they are currently scheduled.

Outreach Director Tiffany Pierce & Pastor Abbey would office at the East Campus part of the week, based on the needs of ministries.

Other program ministry staff (music, youth, children's) would serve both campuses as needed. Staff would spend time during the week at each campus, based on the particular events or ministries scheduled for the week. Administrative tasks would happen downtown.

We would also anticipate needing additional part-time custodial staff to assist with maintenance across both locations.

9. What happens to Faith UMC's members?

If this adoption moves forward, Faith UMC's members will officially become members of Fort Smith First UMC. This will allow them to participate fully in our ministries, leadership, and decision-making.

10. What would happen to Faith UMC's leadership structure?

If this adoption moves forward, Faith UMC's existing leadership structure will dissolve as the congregation becomes part of Fort Smith First UMC. However, former Faith UMC members would be fully integrated into leadership, committees, and ministry teams. Members with experience managing the Faith UMC property would be especially encouraged to serve on the Board of Trustees, and others may find a calling in areas such as worship leadership, discipleship, and outreach. The goal is not simply to blend leadership structures but to build a new future together.

If we move forward, we will form a Launch Team made up of both Fort Smith First UMC members and former Faith UMC members to help guide the transition. This team would work closely with our staff and leadership to develop a ministry plan, ensure a welcoming transition, and set clear steps for how we grow together as one congregation.

Financial Considerations & Property Management

11. What are the estimated financial costs of maintaining the East Campus?

Using our latest understanding of Faith's 2024 numbers, the utilities, insurance, and maintenance costs for the Faith UMC building were about $45,400 per year. If adopted, the second campus would also probably need to add additional custodial capacity. These costs would need to be incorporated into our overall budget. Please note that these are historical overhead expenses only, and ministries and programming would be additional costs. We would also want to consider ways to ensure long-term sustainability, including a possible income-producing tuition-based children's ministry program and other creative uses of the space.

Faith UMC Overhead Expenses	2024 Average
Building Maintenance (2024)	$4,859.00
Building Insurance (2024)	$11,984.00
Utilities (2024)	$12,034.00
Grounds (current)	$8,805.00
Custodian (current)	$7,700.00
TOTAL	$45,382.00

12. Does Faith UMC have any debts?

No. Their building is fully paid off, which is a blessing.

13. Will the Faith UMC property be fully owned by Fort Smith First UMC after adoption?

Yes. If the adoption is approved by both churches and the Arkansas UMC, Faith UMC's property would transfer to Fort Smith First UMC. Like all United Methodist churches, it would continue to be held in trust for the denomination under the Trust Clause.

14. What about finances, legal papers, and assets?

All bank accounts and financial assets of Faith UMC would be transferred into the Fort Smith First UMC financial structure. Faith UMC's memorial funds and assets would come under the Fort Smith First UMC umbrella and be managed as part of our overall ministry resources. The Fort Smith First UMC Treasurer, in cooperation with the Finance Committee and Trustees, would oversee and manage all accounts and funds. Any memorial gifts or designated funds previously given to Faith UMC for specific purposes would continue to be used in accordance with donor intent.

15. Are there anticipated renovations or updates needed?

While the Building could be used as-is with minimal changes, such as signage, there are some aesthetic updates we'd like to make such as fresh paint, landscaping, and some interior improvements to make the space feel fresh and welcoming. The Faith UMC building has a relatively new roof, and beyond some deferred maintenance items, there are no major maintenance issues that we believe will require significant repairs.

We plan to apply for an Arkansas Conference Transformation Grant and may also seek support from our Fort Smith First UMC Foundation to help with these updates.

Decision-Making and Process

16. Who makes the decision on whether this adoption happens?

At minimum, both churches must approve the adoption through their respective Charge Conferences. In our congregation, the Charge Conference is our Administrative Board. Additionally, the District Board of Church Location and Building must grant approval. The Book of Discipline outlines the steps for an adoption, which, in this case, would be a larger church either receiving the assets of another church that has been closed by the UMC Annual Conference, or a smaller church being merged into a larger church. The exact Book of Discipline process depends on the particular circumstances of the situation.

This is a mutual process of discernment in that Faith UMC's leadership would also hold its own Charge Conference to vote on whether to proceed. This is not a decision being imposed; rather, it is a conversation both congregations, along with the Arkansas Annual Conference of the UMC, are exploring together.

17. Would this partnership be temporary?

No, if this adoption moves forward, it would represent a long-term commitment to ministry in this second location as part of the overall ministry of First UMC. As with all United Methodist churches, clergy appointments would continue to be made by the Bishop and Cabinet based on the needs of the congregation. However, if the East Campus is ultimately found to be unsustainable, Fort Smith First UMC would have the ability to assess the best path forward, including the potential sale of the property if necessary. The goal of this process is to build a thriving ministry, but as good stewards, we would continue to evaluate its long-term sustainability.

18. When would this be decided?

We expect to make a decision sometime in late spring or early summer, with a potential launch in fall. However, the exact timeline will depend on our due diligence research, finance committee, trustees, and executive council recommendations, funding availability from the Arkansas Conference Trustees, Faith UMC's situation, and our District Superintendent.

Decision-Making and Process

19. How can members stay informed?

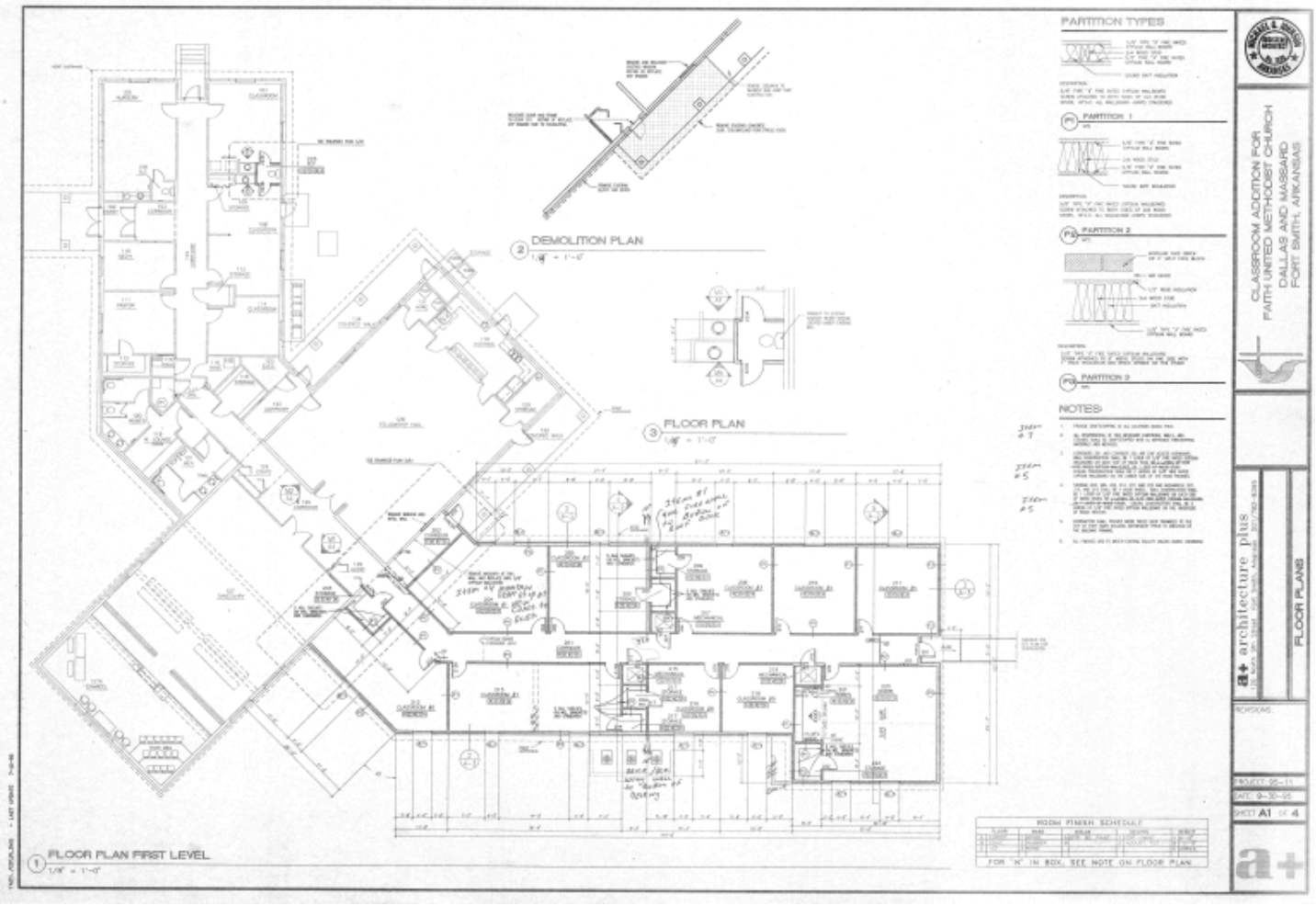
- Weekly in worship
- Through email newsletters
- Online at fsfumc.org/faith-umc-adoption

This decision is not being made in isolation.
Your prayers, wisdom, and input matter!
Our committee leadership and Administrative Board need to hear from you as we seek God's direction together.

20. Who do I talk to if I have questions?

We want to hear from you!

- Email to the Executive Council at **executivecouncil@fsfumc.org**
- Rev. Dr. Blake Bradford (Lead Pastor) **bbradford@fsfumc.org**
- Rev. Abbey Maynard (Executive Pastor) **amaynard@fsfumc.org**
- Dalton Person (Board Chair) **jdaltonperson@gmail.com**
- Larry Weir (Trustee Chair) **Arkansas.weir@gmail.com**
- Rick Beauchamp, Sr. (Finance Chair) **rick_beauchamp@sbcglobal.net**
- Michelle Harp (Staff-Parish Relations Chair) **mmharp2013@gmail.com**
- Rick Pittman (Lay Leader) **Jpitt002@yahoo.com**



Final Thoughts

This opportunity is not about preserving a building or rescuing a struggling church. It is about listening to where God is calling us next.

In choosing to pursue adoption, the people of Faith United Methodist Church have made a courageous and sacrificial decision. They are offering their story, their sacred spaces, and their passion for ministry in the hope that something new can grow. This is not a decision they made lightly. It is rooted in love: for their church, for their neighbors, and for the future of the Gospel in this community.

The leadership of Fort Smith First UMC believes this adoption could be an opportunity for new life, new relationships, and new ways of making disciples. This was not something we planned or sought out. But now that the opportunity is before us, we have a responsibility to prayerfully consider what it could mean for our church and for the River Valley.

This process is not about rushing to a decision or following a predetermined path. It is about faithful listening, bold imagination, and deep trust in God's leading. Some of the best ideas may not even have been spoken yet. That is why we need every voice in our congregation.

We invite you to pray, reflect, and speak from the heart. What do you see? What do you sense the Spirit stirring in you?

Whether or not we move forward with this adoption, we want to be a church that listens well and responds faithfully. Let us keep discerning, listening, and dreaming together.