FUMC Jonesboro
Focus Statements and Guiding Principles
Draft, May 2025

First United Methodist Church onesboro

Our Core Mission:

"To Share the Love of Christ with Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors."

In the scriptures, holy love is defined through the virtues of patience, kindness, and a humility that does not insist on its own way. This love challenges all arrogance of spirit. This love is life-giving. (I Corinthians 13:1-8; Colossians 3:12-17). As we rebuild and grow as a congregation, we believe that our community needs this witness. To build upon the new vision statement from our Council of Bishops, United Methodist Congregations are called to "form disciples who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, **love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously."** This is another way to express our calling.

Our Core Values:

As we encounter the temptations (within ourselves and our culture) to harden our hearts, to close our minds, to exclude, divide, and judge, often in the name of faith, we are called to be a people of:

"Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors"

Open Hearts – gracious, vulnerable, ready to receive and share. In the scriptures, the heart represents what is at the center of our lives. Our words and actions flow from the heart. In the presence of God's life-giving love, we are able to move from what the scriptures call a hardness of heart, a disposition that can cause much harm – to ourselves and to others.

Open Minds – curious, respectful, eager to learn and grow, able to see a diversity of perspectives as a gift to the body of Christ, wanting to comprehend the heights and depths of God's love and to develop strategic ways to share this love with others.

Open Doors – welcoming, accepting, relating to each other with more compassion and less judgment, cultivating the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and temperance.

Our Core Rhythm for Being Aligned and in Tune with the Will of God – 5G:

To **GATHER** for weekly worship through multiple venues and styles. To **GROW** through growth-producing ministries for all. To **GO** into the world equipped to care for one another and to share God's love in the world. And to **GLORIFY** God in a spirit of **GRACE**.

Our Core Proverb and Understanding of the Method God Uses to Bring us into Life:

"God's love comes to us on its way to others."

This action statement expresses the rhythm of life to which we are called. We love because God first loved us (I John 4:19). We open our lives to receive, cultivate, and share God's life-giving love as revealed through Jesus Christ and given through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. This love grows as it is given away. By living in this rhythm, we are renewed to reflect the very image of God. We are able to experience the joys of heaven in this life.

savior in the soul, to use a phrase from the hymn writer, Charles Wesley. Faith is our response to this love. We give ourselves in trust to this love and let this love work within us. This faith leads to a desire for personal and social holiness, with holiness consistently defined by the virtues of love – patience, kindness, and a humility that does not insist on its own way - rather than through the lens of judgment and arrogance of spirit, as holiness is too often viewed. Love, Salvation, Faith, and Holiness all flow from the grace or gift of God, as revealed most supremely through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is a way to characterize the method that God uses to bring us into life. In a word, from Wesley, God's method is to work for reconciliation.

As people of graceful holiness, we are called to walk the middle way, in between extremes. When Wesley talked about this, he had something different in mind than the political extremes that we think of today – although there are connections. Wesley spoke of the Holy Spirit leading us along a middle course between the extremes of "mere formality," on the one hand, where we have the forms of religion but not the power, and the "wildness of enthusiasm," on the other hand, where we confuse our own opinions and prejudices with the work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley asked, "Can we not steer a middle course?" With the Holy Spirit we can. The Holy Spirit unites us together, not in uniformity of opinion, but in our witness of love for one another. The Holy Spirit gives us the fruits and gifts needed to illuminate this love. Most recently, this identity has been illustrated with the image of a "big tent," where all are honored, respected, and loved.

In this spirit, the most recent General Conference made some historic decisions around matters of human sexuality (which has been at the heart of tensions within our denomination). This General Conference removed the language of incompatibility, making room for those in the Plus Community to fully be a part of the church. With these changes, conferences and congregations are now able to consider all persons for leadership based on their calling, character, and commitment to Christ, without a barrier that could have restricted some from ever being considered. Likewise, in promoting healthy and holy relationships, including marriages, there was an effort to strengthen our sexual and moral ethic, calling us to focus on virtues and values that are life-giving for all, rather than subjecting some to a double standard. The following statement appears seven times in the new *Book of Discipline*, calling for "the exercise of responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all personal relationships, social responsibility, faithful sexual intimacy expressed through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God." While virtues and values were added, it must be noted that no mandates were put in place of what was removed. Individuals and congregations remain free to engage in ministry within their own culture and contexts and according to their own conscience. The hope is to always make room under the "big tent" of a shared and higher calling.

At FUMC Jonesboro, we believe that God continues to be at work among us, calling us to faithfulness and fruitfulness as we move into a new season of what it means to be the church. We believe that our community needs this witness.

Core Scriptures within the Wesleyan Tradition Include: I John 4:7-8, I Cor 13:1-8, Matthew 22:37, John 13:34-35, Ephesians 4:1-3, II Cor 5:19; I Corinthians 1:18, 15:2 and Acts 2:27.

A Few Core Scriptures for Our Focus and Vision:

The Call to Love is at the Heart of it all:

"We love because God first loved us." I John 4:19 (also 4:7-8, and v. 16)

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37, and parallels).

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

The call to love God and to love our neighbor as a part of ourselves is at the heart of it all. Jesus tells us that this call is a summary of all the law and the prophets. This means that we filter all interpretations of scripture and of life through this lens (Matthew 22:37-40). To love God is to love "love," for God is love (I John 4:7-8).

We know what this love looks like:

"Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body..." (Colossians 3:12-17)

"Love is patient and kind; love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way...Love never ends." (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

"I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3)

"By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things." (Galatians 5:22-23)

As Wesleyans we are called to spread scriptural holiness across the land. In a culture where holiness is often defined as judgment and division, for us holiness is defined by these virtues. God is known through this kind of love.

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