

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY · SPRING 2026

Our church holds a once-in-a-generation question about the undeveloped land on our west campus. Rather than rush to an answer, leadership is inviting the whole congregation into seasons of prayer, learning, and discernment. This summary draws together the four congregational learning documents: our discernment process, the pressures our church is navigating, the pressures our community is facing, and the values that will guide our decision.

ONE OF FOUR · OUR DISCERNMENT PROCESS

Four phases carry our congregation from learning to decision. Leadership has committed to transparency, prayer, and shared listening at every step.

SPRING 2026 Leadership Alignment Council, Trustees & Finance shape the Discernment Covenant. Commitments to transparency and shared listening are signed.	SUMMER 2026 Listening & Learning Land Learning Lunches, small-group conversations, and Sunday teaching. Education on stewardship and community context.	FALL 2026 Option Development Four options studied in detail — costs, risks, ministry fit. Congregational feedback is woven back into each option.	WINTER 2026-27 Decision & Commitment A discerned recommendation is brought before the congregation. We move forward together with clarity and unity of spirit.
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The Four Options Before Us

- **Option A · Sell & Invest** — Sell the land at market value and invest proceeds for long-term ministry with a careful draw-down policy.
- **Option B · Church-Led Capital Development** — Raise funds and build programming and ministry space ourselves, church-financed and church-led.
- **Option C · Mixed-Use Partnership** — Partner via ground lease or shared development addressing housing, a parsonage, pantry space, and community needs.
- **Option D · Do Nothing Right Now** — After careful evaluation, opt to pause and revisit opportunities in the future.

TWO OF FOUR · PRESSURES ON OUR CHURCH

FUMC Bentonville is healthy, growing, and young — and that growth is pressing. Naming the pressures honestly is how we steward what we have been given.

+21% In-person worship growth (276 → 333 weekly)	+82% Online worship growth (534 → 970 weekly)	27 Average congregant age · ≈200 youth & children	7 days Per week our building is in active use
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- **Worship at capacity.** The 9:00 a.m. service hit 100% capacity in January 2025; a third Unplugged service launched on Pentecost Sunday in response.
- **Children & youth at the edges.** Nursery, elementary spaces, and VBS have all hit capacity; security systems need to be upgraded.
- **Finances are stable but lean.** 2024-25 ended +\$9K. The approved 2026-27 budget is \$1,376,834 — a 6.7% increase, with worship and programming up 26.6% to meet growing demand.
- **A national giving shift.** Religion’s share of U.S. charitable giving has fallen from 50% (1994) to 23% (2024). Methodists have the lowest tithing rate among major Protestants at 12%.

THREE OF FOUR · PRESSURES ON OUR COMMUNITY

Bentonville is one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, and Northwest Arkansas is in an acute affordability crunch. Loving our neighbors begins with seeing them and their needs clearly.

65K Bentonville residents (54,819 in 2020)	170K+ New NWA homes needed by 2050	50.4% Bentonville homeownership rate (vs. 65.6% nationally)	45% Benton County housing + transportation cost burden
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- **Homes are out of reach for working families.** Average home price in Benton County is \$471,427. Area median family income is \$101,800 — many working families cannot qualify.
- **Higher burden than major metros.** At 45%, combined housing and *transportation* costs in Benton County exceed Manhattan (36%), Austin (42%), and Nashville (43%).
- **Our pantry is telling us the story.** The Second Street Pantry — housed in our building — served 47,000 neighbors in 2024, a 100%+ increase from the prior year. In the first half of 2026, the number of households served increased by 13% and the number of members in those families 17% over those in 2025, showing that the need continues to grow.
- **Our pastor has no parsonage.** Without housing support in pastoral compensation, FUMC Bentonville is limited to placements where the pastor can independently afford the Benton County housing market.

FOUR OF FOUR · OUR FAITH, OUR VALUES

Before we choose what to do with the land, we name what we believe, which will inform our process and conversation. Our Welcome Statement, our track record of showing up, and our Methodist tradition together shape how we discern.

- **We welcome all.** FUMC Bentonville extends radical hospitality to people of every race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, economic station, and political ideology. The Communion Table is God’s table.
- **We have a track record.** Our congregation helped found Helping Hands and Legacy Village (senior housing). Our building hosts the Second Street Pantry, literacy tutoring, Wee Friends Day Care, and so many more — seven days a week.
- **Care for the vulnerable is core to who we are.** Five years of Pastor Michelle’s Four Questions conversations point to one consistent shared value: care for those on the margins. Safe and reliable housing comes up time and again.
- **Our Methodist tradition points to housing as a justice issue.** The 2024 UMC Social Principles name shelter alongside food, education, and liberty as a basic human right — intertwined with health, aging, and migration.
- **Scripture steadies us.** James 2:14–17 reminds us that faith without works is dead. The Parable of the Talents and Esther 4:14 invite us to ask: might we be called to faithfulness “for such a time as this”?

A question to carry together in prayer

Northwest Arkansas churches together hold over 7 square miles of undeveloped land. Whatever we choose to do with ours says something to our neighbors about who and what we believe this church is for. What do we want to say?

How can you take part?

Come to a Sunday Land Learning Lunch to learn about the work the church has done to date, to hear about the pressures facing our church and our community, and to reflect on our centering values. Join a small-group conversation to share your perspectives and hear the perspectives of others. Submit an online question, concern, or prayer.

Share what you hope, what you fear, and what you sense God is doing among us. Every voice helps shape what comes next.