

Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church – Congregation

409 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Wilmington, NC 28401

For Immediate Release – Wilmington, NC –

On Monday March 27, 2023 – The NC conference arm of the United Methodist Church denomination announced through various local media, the closure of Wilmington’s Historic Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. What was not made clear or shared was that the local church leaders and parishioners of Fifth Avenue were completely blindsided by the closure, having only been informed the night before during what was expected to be an informational session scheduled by the District Superintendent. The local church’s members were led to believe the informational session Sunday evening had been scheduled by the District Superintendent as part of an authorized disaffiliation process sanctioned by the United Methodist Church. Instead, the members were informed that the local church was closed, effectively ending Fifth Avenue’s opportunity to disaffiliate. Interestingly, the District Superintendent was accompanied by the UMC Bishop of the North Carolina Conference at the Sunday night session.

Fifth Avenue never asked for, agreed to or wanted the closure, nor were its members ever given a chance to participate in the decision to close the church down. Its members are devastated and brokenhearted by the closure which has been forced upon them.

In 2022, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church provided a set of rules and guidelines, by which local churches who apply and follow the rules, are given the opportunity to disaffiliate by the end of 2023. After much prayer and consideration, Fifth Avenue

UMC's Church Council voted in February 2023 to begin the disaffiliation process. In following the guidelines provided by the conference, church members trusted conference officials to schedule a congregational vote by the end of March to carry out the disaffiliation process. Instead, the conference broke that trust and shut down the local church. In a written resolution delivered to the congregation on Sunday evening, the conference Bishop and others declared that “exigent circumstances exist” requiring immediate protection of the Fifth Avenue Church property. From whom the property needs protection against, the congregation is at a loss to understand or know. The resolution goes on to state, “the Church no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized and incorporated”. Nothing could be further from the truth and the congregation at Fifth Avenue wants all those who are willing to listen -- to know.

Church leaders were completely blindsided by the United Methodist Church’s decision to close the church after almost 176 years of ministry in Wilmington. The church is a vibrant, closely knit congregation of devout Methodist Christians,- made up of mostly senior citizens who have attended this church their whole lives and have now been told their final service will be Easter Sunday.

The UMC went as far as to change the locks on the church building Monday, 3/27.

Founded in 1847, remains self-sustaining and celebrated its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 with a yearlong celebration.

We at Fifth Avenue are all still in shock over the matter. We are in the process of gathering together to discuss a way forward. The church asks that the Bishop reconsider this ill made decision and return the church to it's congregation who have loved and supported the church for many decades and allow them to move forward with the disaffiliation process that the United Methodist Church itself put in place. Allow us to move forward along with all the other local churches throughout North Carolina and across the USA seeking to disaffiliate by following the rules set forth in the Book of Discipline, the Disaffiliation Agreement and the rules published by the NC Annual Conference on its website. We are playing by the conference's own rules, but now appear to have been completely shut down. Its sad and it breaks our heart to be treated this way.

The Church Congregation

Contact: Susan Godwin Long - 910-540-7611