

**Recommendation for Discontinuation of
Grace United Methodist Church of Stockton, California**

Submitted by: Norm Mowery, Interim Pastor

and the Church Council of Grace United Methodist Church, Stockton.

Fiscal Impact: There is no projected fiscal impact to the Annual Conference

Background

Grace United Methodist of Stockton, California was founded in 1850 as Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, South making it one of the oldest churches in our conference. Today's location on Lincoln Street is the fourth building that it has occupied. Over the years some of the most outstanding ministers in the conference have been appointed to this church and there have been creative dynamic ministries. Many lives have been touched by this church and outstanding lay persons have been raised up here. However, for the past twenty-five years this church has experienced declining membership, declining programs and lay leadership, declining revenues and participation in paying apportionments.

In January 2005, Delta District Superintendent Ted Virts appointed a Paragraph 213 Taskforce Committee to address the future viability of Grace UMC. The 213 Committee recommended that Grace UMC close by July 1, 2006. The recommendation was rejected by the congregation. Over the past ten years many different attempts have been made to revitalize the church including several studies that included merging with other congregations. Even so, the congregation continued to decline.

On February 24, 2013, the Grace UMC Charge Conference voted to sell their parsonage in order to address deferred maintenance of their facilities. Central Valley District Superintendent Mariellen Yoshino then convened another Paragraph 213 Committee. After three meetings, the committee agreed that the church would select and pursue a focused ministry strategy that would have the potential for revitalizing the congregation. If this strategy proved unsuccessful, the church would discontinue. During this time Equitable Compensation funds were granted in order to sustain a 3/4 pastoral appointment. A change in District Superintendents at the one-year mark and the unexpected death of the Lay Leader delayed following through on an assessment.

On January 20, 2016, appointed Pastor Roger Kimble informed District Superintendent (D.S.) Debra Brady that the congregation had insufficient funds to sustain his compensation and other obligations past April 30th. Pastor Kimble elected to retire February 29th in order that the congregation might have more financial freedom to determine their next course of action.

The following steps were taken in the discernment process:

1. On February 9, 2016, D.S. Debra Brady met with the Leadership Team to consult about their options. The leaders were reluctant to consider options other than another congregation simply joining their church to create critical mass. Based on their financial assessment, they requested a supply pastor.
2. On March 1, 2016, Retired Pastor Norm Mowery was assigned to the congregation and tasked with leading a financial and ministry assessment.

- 1 3. On March 20, 2016, D.S. Debra Brady led worship and conducted a church conference during which a
2 Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development was elected in order to expand the
3 leadership team beyond the four people currently serving.
- 4 4. On April 3, 2016, Pastor Norm conducted a congregational meeting to update the congregation on
5 various issues including their financial status which had not been given in nearly 2 years. The proceeds
6 from the parsonage sale, the cell tower lease sale and the memorials endowment fund were nearly
7 depleted.
- 8 5. During the months of April and May, the newly structured Finance Committee continued to assess
9 their financial situation and various cost-saving strategies. While initially hopeful, it became clear by
10 the end of May that the congregation was running a large monthly deficit and they could not operate
11 past June.

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13 The following steps were taken in the approval process:

- 14 1. On Sunday, June 5, 2016 the Church Council recommended discontinuation.
- 15 2. On Tuesday, June 7, 2016 a Special Church Conference voted for discontinuation. There were 19
16 persons present: 16 yes, 1 no, 2 abstained.
- 17 3. On June 8, 2016 Bishop Brown and the Cabinet unanimously consented (8-0-0) to affirm the
18 recommendation of the Stockton Grace UMC Church Conference for discontinuation.

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20 **Therefore, be it resolved** as follows that:

- 21 1. In accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 2549.2 in the 2012 Book of Discipline, Grace United
22 Methodist Church of Stockton, California be discontinued effective June 30, 2016.
- 23 2. For those who do not request otherwise, membership will be transferred to Holy Cross United
24 Methodist Church of Stockton.
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- 26 3. Title and possession of all real and personal property, assets and liabilities of Grace United Methodist
27 Church, Stockton shall be transferred to the Central Extension Society for missional outreach.
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- 29 4. All relevant, current and historic records of the congregation shall be deposited with the Central United
30 Methodist of Stockton with consultation with the Conference Commission on Archives and History.

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