

# Know in November

## **Church Fact Sheet**

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### 1. Norcross UMC (CE. 8)

<b>District</b>	Central East
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.norcrossfirst.org/">https://www.norcrossfirst.org/</a>
<b>AWA</b>	191
<b>Vote %</b>	78%
<b># of ballots</b>	228
<b>Margin of Votes</b>	~25 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	Yes
<b>Missional</b>	Norcross First UMC is a highly diverse city and would provide an opportunity for creating a multicultural or Hispanic congregation. The current Hispanic UMC congregation met at Norcross and showed that it can reach this community, and voted to stay UMC. Still, unfortunately, it will be displaced if disaffiliation is approved. The population growth in Gwinnett County is exponential and increasingly diverse. The need for strong, connected ministries for different multicultural populations is evident. The UMC already has in place systems and processes in which to support and help these growing congregations. The Nett UMC is an excellent example of how a multicultural church can thrive in Gwinnett County.
<b>Process</b>	The disaffiliation process at Norcross FUMC was marred by misinformation and lack of transparency. In particular, the leadership at Norcross UMC did not provide adequate information to the UMC Hispanic members of Norcross. The Norcross administration did not include the Hispanic congregation in any discernment process or inform them of

	<p>meetings. In fact, they were told to refrain from discussing this process, and many were left off of the membership rolls and unable to vote at all. A whole congregation that wanted to Stay UMC was silenced.</p> <p>In addition, a member of Norcross UMC who is a Delegate for the North Georgia Conference for General Conference publically made the case for the church to disaffiliate but then also made plans to join another UMC so that she could continue to vote at General Conference.</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>While the main congregation at Norcross First UMC does not have a strong Stay UMC contingent, the thriving Hispanic congregation does. Because of this, Norcross would be an excellent building for a merger with a church like The Nett or a start-up for a multi-cultural church. On its own, a Hispanic congregation would need help maintaining the property. To help with funding, the church can rent out some of its facilities to local businesses that align with its mission as a church. We have seen this type of rental income help other churches. If this model proves unattainable after a trial period, the UMC can sell the church and reinvest in new Hispanic congregations.</p>
<b>Testimonies</b>	<p><a href="#">Rev. Aida Luz Beltran-Gaetan</a></p>

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## 2. The Fountain at Sugarloaf UMC (CE.16)

<b>District</b>	Central East
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.TheFountainChurch.org">http://www.TheFountainChurch.org</a>
<b>AWA</b>	247
<b>Vote %</b>	80%
<b># of ballots</b>	193
<b>Margin of Votes</b>	~27 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	Yes
<b>Missional</b>	<p>The missional prospects of the Fountain at Sugarloaf UMC look slightly different from other churches. This church's missional importance centers around the skyrocketing population growth in Gwinnett County. The Central East District merged The Fountain UMC and Sugarloaf UMC in 2022 to meet the demands of this growth. The Fountain, a newer church plant, was searching for a merger because they had been a start-up in a middle school for several years. The needs of this community were so critical that the Annual Conference provided significant funding for this merger. One leader involved in this merger said that even if every other church in the 25-mile radius of The Fountain at Sugarloaf is filled to capacity, it wouldn't even scratch the surface of the number of people there.</p> <p>In addition, this is a diverse community, and the ability to reach out to such a diverse and growing community is exactly what we, as United Methodists, should do. On that note, because of financial restraints and the housing market, it would cost a minimum of \$10 Million to plant a brand-new church in this area.</p>

	<p>For this very reason, it is better to have a property that the North Georgia Annual Conference has already poured time, money, and resources into.</p> <p>Below is The Fountain at Sugarloaf's track record of paying apportionments. Since 1998, they have missed over 2.1 million dollars in apportionment payments to the Annual Conference. Here are their apportionment payments by percentage over the past ten years:</p> <p>Apportionment percentage since 2012:</p> <p>2012-4.5%  2013-2.2%  2014-1.2%  2015-9.2%  2016-4.2%  2017-0%  2018-0%  2019-0%  2020-17%  2021-27.1%  2022-30%</p> <p>They have also received salary support of \$126,000 since 2011.</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p>Like many churches, the discernment process for disaffiliation at The Fountain at Sugarloaf UMC was fraught with misinformation, loopholes, and undercover meetings. When The Fountain UMC merged with Sugarloaf UMC in 2022, there was a verbal understanding with the Central East District Strategic Growth Team that the pastor and congregational leaders at The Fountain would not pursue disaffiliation as they planned for the merger with Sugarloaf UMC. The North Georgia Conference understood this placement to be too critical and valuable to risk sending a pastor and church to merge with Sugarloaf, who would pursue disaffiliation. However, the pastor and congregation at The Fountain did precisely that. They sought disaffiliation from the moment they arrived.</p>

In 2022, there was never any information or formal inquiry into the disaffiliation process. The church leadership never sent a request to the district office. However, disaffiliation meetings were happening without the knowledge of the DS. Similar to other churches, these meetings were full of misinformation and discussions about how disaffiliation was less about lgbtq inclusion and more about having control of their property. In December of 2022, the Annual Conference enacted “the pause” on disaffiliations, and it was only then that The Fountain approached the District office that they had been discussing disaffiliation. They then joined the lawsuit. Officially, there was never a formal discernment process done here, but instead, because of the lawsuit, a court order mandated a vote.

Here is a link to a public video of a meeting in February of 2023 at The Fountain at Sugarloaf about the reasons for the pause.

<https://vimeo.com/799477582?fbclid=IwAR03P3ladybFY3H0ic3T-jUr4bG9Z85TvagvYqOLjbNkQdIUk3lsxQ8enis>

You can listen to sections from 1 hour and 2 minutes to 1 hour and 7 minutes. There are three things to note:

1. The staff member who raises a question about the ethics of using par. 2553 in this section says she was fired for raising her objection.
2. The church leader representing the discernment task force clearly states they are pursuing par. 2553 for financial reasons because they could not afford the proper avenue through par. 2549.
3. The pastor claims their discernment task force based all their meetings on disaffiliation around their disagreements with the UMC. Their sole purpose was to find a way to get out of the UMC and not to explore the pros and cons of staying UMC.

<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>Much like the missional aspects of the church, the sustainability prospects of The Fountain at Sugarloaf are somewhat different from other churches. Because of the money that the North Georgia Conference poured into the vital merger between The Fountain and Sugarloaf UMC, this property is in excellent condition. There is no deferred maintenance on this property. This church does, however, have \$2.8 Million in debt. This debt has significantly reduced in the last few years primarily because of the excellent leadership they had previously, as well as the conference allowing the church to refrain from paying their apportionments for a time so that they could refinance. There is not a strong Stay UMC remnant in this congregation. However, because of the missionally valuable location, this property can provide a perfect spot for a decisive and powerful restart, especially considering the cost of trying to plant a new expression in this area. There are missional opportunities to begin this congregation anew to reach this growing and diverse community.</p>
<b>Testimonies</b>	<p><a href="#">Jennifer Von Essen - Former Staff Member</a></p>
<b>Relevant Links</b>	<p><a href="#">Denominational Discussions at The Fountain</a> (particularly 1:02-1:07)</p>

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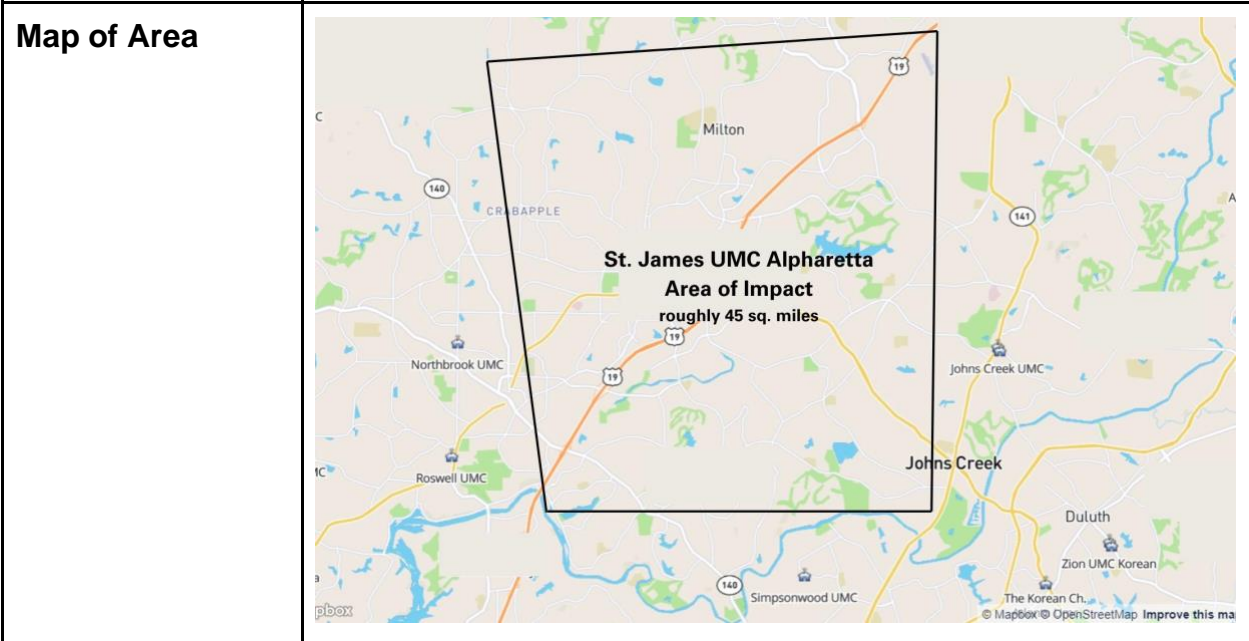
### 3. St. James UMC – Alpharetta (CN.7)

<b>District</b>	Central North
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stjamesumc.org">http://www.stjamesumc.org</a>
<b>AWA</b>	396
<b>Vote %</b>	67.5%
<b># of ballots</b>	369
<b>Margin</b>	~ 3 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	No
<b>Missional</b>	<p>Located in Alpharetta, St. James UMC is one of the largest and most impactful United Methodist Black churches in our entire connection. Founded in 1867, St. James is one of the oldest Historic Black Methodist churches in Georgia. They are a missional and evangelical church. They participate in many local outreach projects and have grown significantly in their long history. St. James UMC produces gifted and influential ministry candidates and clergy for our churches. In a nutshell, losing St. James would be a generational loss for our church locally and across our connection.</p> <p>With the disaffiliation of Mt. Pisgah UMC and Alpharetta UMC, St. James UMC is the only UMC option available in this region. Preserving St. James UMC ensures current members and the community have a vibrant UMC option.</p>
<b>Process</b>	The process seemed rushed, and the discussions for disaffiliations focused heavily on property ownership rather than

disagreements with the Book of Discipline as defined by the terms of paragraph 2553. There were reports that Global Methodist leaders in the Alpharetta area heavily influenced their decision-making, but not during the official process. We have heard no reports of misinformation about the UMC shared during their official meetings and, in good faith, believe the UMC was represented in an appropriate manner during official meetings.

**Sustainability** St. James UMC has considerable assets in both building and finances. Many in the church plan to stay with the church no matter what happens. The number of folks who would leave would likely be negligible.

**Testimonies**



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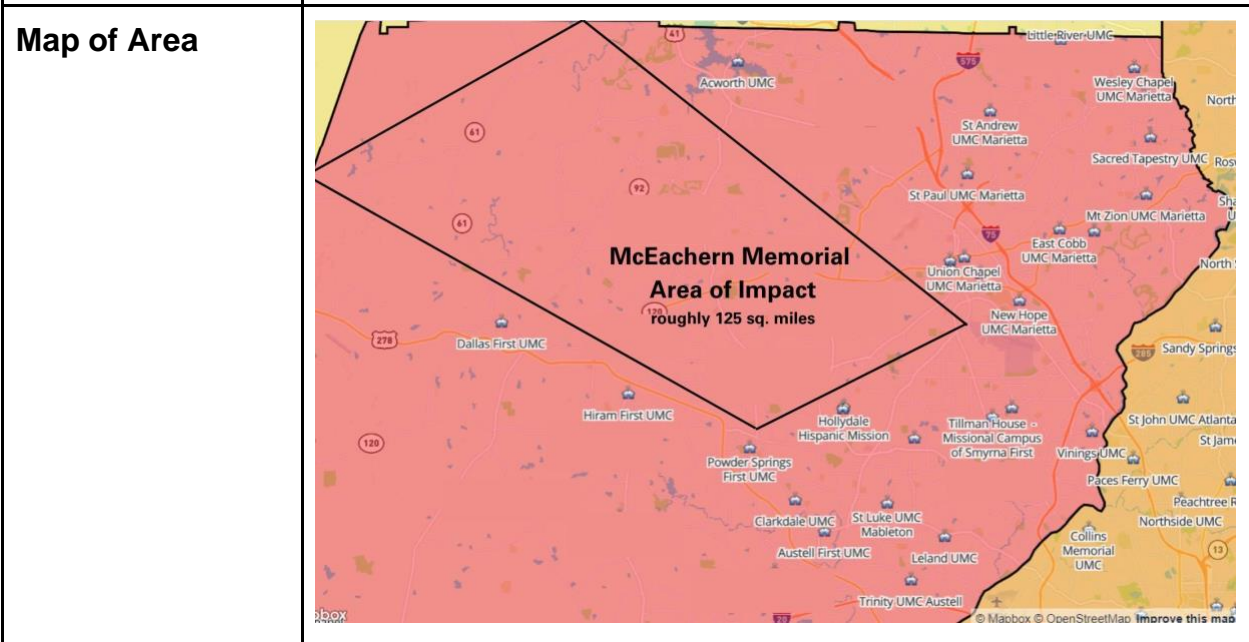
### 4. McEachern Memorial UMC (CW.15)

<b>District</b>	Central West
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.meachernumc.org">http://www.meachernumc.org</a>
<b>AWA</b>	349
<b>Vote %</b>	69%
<b># of ballots</b>	465
<b>Margin of Votes</b>	~ 14 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	Yes
<b>Missional</b>	<p>McEachern Memorial UMC is a central hub in West Cobb that has served the ministry of Jesus Christ for nearly 200 years. This church, known as the “missions church,” has done a lot of good in their neighborhood and across the world. It is a significant outreach church, and some of its ministries include the Car Care Ministry, Teach One to Lead One, more local missions than could be named, and many International Missions. In addition, they have an ESOL program with hundreds of participants and an active Hispanic congregation. Every weekend, over 1,000 children, youth, and adults participate in the athletic programs on their campus. They are a dynamic and vibrant church.</p> <p>There is a lot of growth in this geographical area. New Subdivisions are being built all the time, and new families are moving to the area because of the good schools. If McEachern Memorial UMC were to disaffiliate, there would be a UMC desert that would reach 125 square miles. If the other churches in the area requesting to disaffiliate do, then there would be a massive group of displaced United Methodists without a home.</p>

<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p>The misinformation and secret meetings at McEachern Memorial UMC are not unique to the disaffiliation process. For years, a small group of members have been spreading rumors and falsities about the UMC to the church to garner votes. These rumors are a common thread in many churches that voted to disaffiliate.</p> <p>The part of the process at McEachern Memorial UMC that should give us pause is <b>who was not allowed to vote because of who the church administration and leadership left off their membership roster</b>. Three years' worth of confirmation classes were left off the rolls given to the District Office. When a youth professes faith in Christ, they make a vow to the church and are then joined in membership and have every right to vote. The church denied these three confirmation classes of that right. Additionally, McEachern has a sizeable Hispanic congregation that was also left off the official membership rolls given to the District Office. So not only was the next generation denied the right to vote, but so was an entire congregation that represents the incredible diversity that is the United Methodist Church. While we do not know how any of these left off the rolls would have voted, we do know that their number is enough that it could have changed the vote. Therefore, their vote to disaffiliate does not represent the entire will of the church.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p>	<p>Currently, there is a group of nearly 400 displaced United Methodists from surrounding churches that have voted to disaffiliate who need a church home. McEachern is the logical place for this contingent. The McEachern facilities are in great shape and include a parsonage. McEachern has \$1.2 million in cash and assets equal to \$26 million. There are currently around 130 folks meeting regularly with a base of about 400 people. There is also a large group of folks who will stay with the church no matter what they do. The church does hold debt that equals \$1.3 million; however, with the number of people staying at UMC and the money they have on hand, this is not an unhealthy amount of debt.</p>

A crucial component of McEachern's sustainability involves an endowment. McEachern Memorial UMC receives the proceeds of a percentage of this endowment every year, which conservatively disperses \$700,000 to the missions and ministry of the church. The McEachern family established this endowment for the McEachern Memorial UMC. The endowment by-laws state that if McEachern Memorial UMC ceases to be McEachern UMC, then the proceeds of this endowment are to be turned over to the North Georgia Conference to use as they see fit. This endowment is not promised to a disaffiliated church. The proceeds of this endowment would be around \$10 million over a decade. However, the disaffiliating members are currently working to change these by-laws to make the disaffiliating church the beneficiary of these funds. These efforts violate the intended will of the McEachern family. Thus, voting "no" to McEachern's request will ensure the endowment will benefit the people the family intended and help the McEachern **United Methodist Church** as it reestablishes.

**Testimonies** [Devin Gordon](#)  
[Bill Hanse](#)



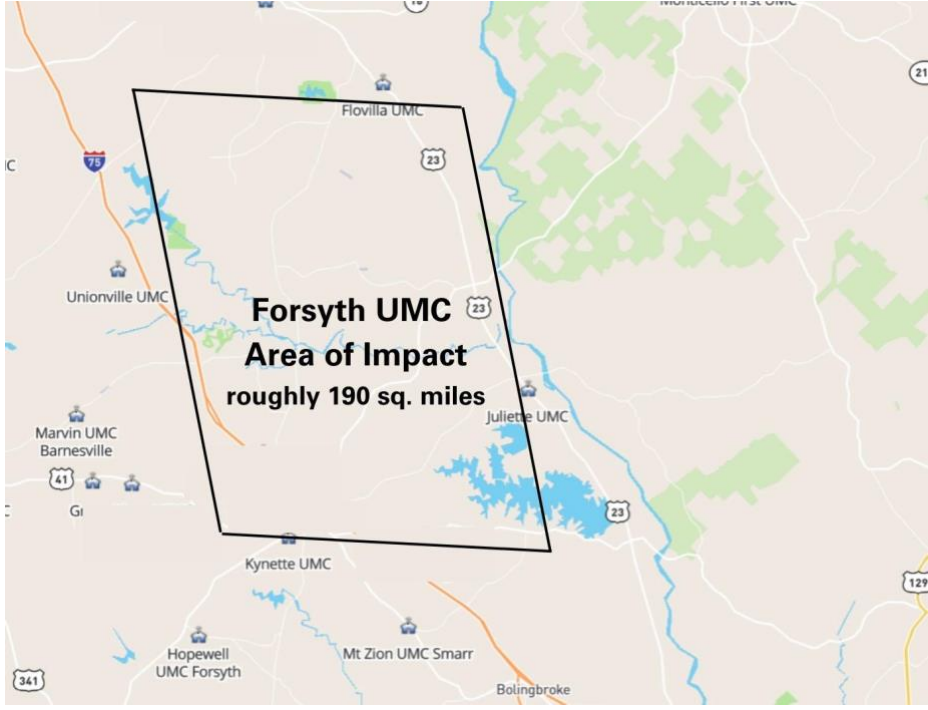
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### 5. Forsyth First UMC (SW.11)

<b>District</b>	Southwest
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.forsythumc.org">http://www.forsythumc.org</a>
<b>Average Worship Attendance</b>	175
<b>Vote %</b>	74%
<b># of ballots</b>	293
<b>Margin of Votes</b>	~20 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	No
<b>Missional</b>	<p>Forsyth First UMC is a county seat church. Its loss, in addition to surrounding disaffiliating churches, would create a UMC desert (see map below), especially as it sits right on the border with South Georgia. The facility is in downtown Forsyth and is an anchor for the community. They have a preschool and after school program that reaches young families in the community. The church has a passion for missions. They have a long-term relationship with mission trips to Culebra, Puerto Rico and to Glory Ridge in Tennessee. They are the anchor church for a local mission weekend called Kingdom Builders where teams of volunteers help community members with home repair and upgrades. There is an active youth and music program in the church as well. Forsyth UMC is celebrating their 200th year of ministry this year.</p>
<b>Process</b>	<p>There was a biased process. The pastor at the time was leading the discussion and telling folks they needed to disaffiliate. When the pastor was moved to a new church they shared that it's</p>

	<p>because they were conservative. Many secret meetings where misinformation about the church was continuously shared. There was no effort to have a balanced discussion about what the future of the church would be. The DS was ignored and their directions were not followed for this process.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p>	<p>There is a Stay Forsyth UMC group that worked hard to help inform members. If not approved to disaffiliate, there will be a strong group of UMC folks to sustain the ministry. Forsyth First UMC has no debt and has 500k in savings. The building is in good condition, in fact the Sanctuary and Gym are relatively new builds. Additionally the giving is such that ministry can continue even if a significant portion of the congregation leaves, though many in the congregation have voiced that they are going to stay with their church no matter what happens, meaning a larger number than those who voted to Stay UMC will most likely remain with the church. Anticipated over 75 will stay UMC based on vote results.</p>
<p><b>Testimonies</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Rev. Carol Cook - current pastor</a></p>
<p><b>Map of Area</b></p>	 <p>The map shows the 'Forsyth UMC Area of Impact' outlined in a black polygon, covering approximately 190 square miles. The area includes several other UMC churches: Flovilla UMC, Unionville UMC, Marvin UMC Barnesville, Kynette UMC, Hopewell UMC Forsyth, Mt Zion UMC Smarr, Juliette UMC, and Bolingbroke. Major roads like US-75, US-23, US-41, and US-341 are also visible.</p>
<p><b>Relevant Links</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Monroe Reporter Article</a></p>

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### 6. Griffin First UMC (SW.12)

<b>District</b>	Southwest
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.griffin-fumc.org">http://www.griffin-fumc.org</a>
<b>Average Weekly Attendance</b>	271
<b>Vote %</b>	68%
<b># of ballots</b>	460
<b>Margin of Votes</b>	6 votes
<b>Part of the lawsuit?</b>	Yes
<b>Missional</b>	Griffin First UMC is a county seat church. For as long as the church has existed it has been known as United Methodist and has served as a leader of the region. Griffin just recently merged with Hanleiter UMC for the missional purpose of reaching the community in downtown Griffin. The church now consists of two different campuses, one covering downtown and one covering outside the city. The absence of Griffin First UMC would create a UMC desert of about 105 sq. miles. (see map below). The loss of this church would cause generational damage.
<b>Process</b>	The process by which Griffin First sought to vote on disaffiliation was a biased process. Those who sought disaffiliation made decisions and compelled others to vote in a certain way. Originally the church council took a vote about whether to pursue a discernment process and that vote failed. Shortly after two members of the council were pressured to resign and as soon as they did they were replaced with those known to want disaffiliation so that a second vote could be taken, which is

	<p>contrary to the process set out by the trustees of the North Georgia Annual Conference. The DS was unaware this was a second vote until after the church had entered the lawsuit and called a charge conference. When the day of the vote arrived, those present continuously interrupted the DS, spoke over them, and were generally disorderly, making the entire process of voting frustrating and not taken seriously.</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>There is a large group of folks who are committed to remaining UMC at Griffin. Additionally many in the congregation have stated that they will stay with the church no matter what happens, so the number of folks who will remain with the church is more than those who voted no to disaffiliation. Griffin First has no debt and money in the bank. They have enough savings to maintain two campuses. Additionally both campuses are located in areas where outreach and engagement is possible. The buildings are in good shape and do not currently need any major capital projects. Their property equals around \$17 Million. Anticipated over 150 will stay UMC based on vote results.</p>
<b>Testimonies</b>	<p><a href="#"><u>Isaac Melton - Former Church Council Chair</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Debbie Daniel Bryant - Former SPRC Chair</u></a></p>

**Map of Area**

