



THE FARMHOUSE

FOSTERING THE HEALTH OF OUR PLACE

Formal Appointment Announcement – April 2023

For the first time in ten years, Metamora UMC / The Farmhouse will be receiving a new clerical appointment for our charge as a local church in the Maumee Watershed District of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

United Methodism & Appointments

Episcopal Model

The United Methodist denomination is an Episcopal model – meaning that formal pastoral leadership is established by an administrative body outside of the local congregation (as opposed to a Congregational model where the local congregation determines their own leadership). Usually, this process happens with the discretion of the local congregation, but the decision technically rests with the Bishop and the Cabinet as represented by the District Superintendent.

Itinerancy

The denomination also uses something called itinerancy – that clergy are able to be moved and changed by the episcopacy.

Why Our Appointment is Changing

Normally, an appointment change happens because of one of the following:

- The Conference determines there is a need for a pastor in a different church.
- The local congregation requests an appointment change.
- The pastor requests an appointment change.

An alternative reason would be because an appointed clergy has a change in status. This is the case for Metamora UMC / The Farmhouse as the current appointed clergy, Tyler Kleeberger, will no longer be a Local Licensed Pastor in the United Methodist Church as of June 30th, 2023.

The New Appointment

Beginning on July 1st, 2023 Reverend Amie Brodie will be taking over as the primary appointed clergy of Metamora UMC / The Farmhouse. Pastor Amie has been on staff at The Farmhouse since 2018 and officially became a Local Licensed Pastor in 2021 in which she was formally appointed as a pastor at The Farmhouse alongside of Tyler. This dual-appointment has put our church in a constructive situation in the midst of this change.

Clerical Difficulties

For various reasons ranging from COVID to the denominational split that is currently underway, there is a shortage of clergy in the United Methodist Church. This year, there will be many local churches who will not receive pastors. Further, because of our size and financial limitations, we are only able to host a local licensed pastor (as opposed to an elder) and that appointed clergy must be less than full-time (because of health insurance limitations). This further constrains the availability of appointments.

We are in the rare position of having available an appointable clergy in good standing who has several years of experience, is able to be less than full-time, understands the context and vision of The Farmhouse, and has shown both confidence and competency in executing this role.

Other Staff Changes

Our SPPRC (Staff-Pastor-Parish-Relations-Committee) – chaired by Ashley Pryor and assisted by members Becky Gillen (Annual Conference Delegate), Brenda Holdridge, Kelly Harmon, June Steinmetz, and Brent Nofziger – has been very busy processing this change and making further adjustments.

Alongside of the appointment change, the decision was made to supplement the staff roles to further accommodate the changes. Several roles were emphasized and plans were created to potentially build the staff to include more positions and people – including a potential Youth Leadership role – but the initial change that was decided upon was an all-encompassing role that could help maintain the current state of the church outside of the pastoral role.

The **Farmhouse Director** role was established to oversee and organize the building space, the social enterprises, and the various events that occur including assistance to current youth programming and barn rentals. This position is primarily concerned with organizing volunteers and creating systems to sustain all of these items and tasks. At the April Board Meeting, the SPPRC's proposal to hire Tracy York for this position was confirmed.

Among the other roles, there are proposals for responsibilities that Tyler Kleeberger could hold so as to continue helping the church and offering his abilities and presence.

Appointment Change Timeline

Due to the unique nature of our church – being a “New Church Start” as well as a traditional church that includes various enterprises and unique aspects in a rural community as well as having had a consistent appointment for a long duration (the average UMC appointment is three years) – we are utilizing the last several weeks of the current appointment year (which ends on June 30th, 2023) to transition the leadership.

Transition Period – Present – June 30th, 2023

While Tyler is still appointed, Tyler and Amie are working together to transition the roles and prepare for the appointment changes. At this point, Amie is responsible for most items so that Tyler can act as a safety net – a trial period of sorts that allows Amie to own her growing role amidst Tyler’s availability.

This is why Tyler has been absent from certain roles, particularly our 10:00 service. Amie had requested that she have an opportunity to fulfill the leadership responsibilities on her own for training purposes. This also involves other items such as an enterprise and event oversight, media and technology, pastoral care, and administrative responsibilities. The staff felt it was best to “practice” the new changes while the opportunity for assistance was fully available.

During this time, Tracy York will also be beginning her expanded role as a part of the transition.

New Appointment – July 1st, 2023

Beginning on July 1st, the new roles will be formally set. At this time, Tyler Kleeberger will no longer be an appointed local licensed pastor. As per the West Ohio Conference’s recommendation, Tyler will take an informal sabbatical. Technically, this is informal because local licensed pastors are not entitled to a sabbatical. However, since Tyler will still hold certification in the denomination, the conference wanted to extend a period for him to make adjustments as well as for the church to make adjustments to the change.

Sabbatical Process

The intention of the sabbatical is that Tyler will not have formal responsibilities with the church and that he will not be present. Again, the conference requested this as they feel it is necessary to make the transition in leadership. Typically, when a pastor’s appointment changes, they are not supposed to be in contact with the previous congregation for a year. The sabbatical will help accomplish some of those intentions so that the church has an opportunity to adjust and Tyler will be able to “re-enter” the church with a renewed start. The concern with appointment changes is always that the former leader will continue to hold influence and the church never has the opportunity to reconfigure based on the new situation. As the conference and the current stakeholders both hope Tyler can continue to be a part of this church (which is very abnormal in many organizations), the sabbatical is meant to accomplish the transition goals while still giving a way to be a part of the church going forward.

Initial Adjustment Period – July 1st, 2023 – October 1st, 2023

During this time, the conference has suggested that the church use the change as an opportunity to create plans and renew the vision of the church based on the changes that have taken place.

Certainly, the past few years – from the general changes stemming from COVID and the denominational situation to the church entering new territory with our new building – have resulted in a need to continue to discover who we are. A change in leadership offers a situation to formally allow the church to adjust to its next chapter and new season. We must take the time to determine what our priorities are, what our foci should be, and where we intend to go within the next season of the church's life.

Logistically, during this time, Tyler has been afforded the assistance to remain in the parsonage, but will also be required to be uninvolved except in situations that are deemed absolutely necessary by the church or conference. This could be anything from an unforeseeable event to technical assistance needed with an item that was not covered during the transition period.

Potential Review Period – October 1st, 2023 – December 31st, 2023

At the three-month mark, the church leadership and staff will review the situation along with Tyler to determine if the informal sabbatical could end. If applicable, a potential role for Tyler at the church could begin. At the least, it would be deemed appropriate for Tyler to be fully present and participate in the life of the church.

Depending on the circumstances, the sabbatical could continue for its initially determined length through the end of the year. The conference and the church administration have agreed that the parsonage will remain available to Tyler regardless of the review decision.

Next Season Fully Begins – January 1st, 2023

At the beginning of the calendar year, the hope is that all transition steps are complete and the church has had an opportunity to reset in light of the changes. At this time, the setup of the appointment and staff should be fully active.

While this is a helpful projection, there are still many unknown factors and there will certainly need to be room for adjustments as we go. The district has emphasized that this is a very unique appointment process. Further, our district – along with our conference and the denomination as a whole – are undergoing vast changes; many of which are difficult. They are hoping that we will continue to be a healthy church and beacon for our area despite all of the complications happening globally with the church and with United Methodism.

Questions & Concerns Regarding the Changes

Unfortunately, for human beings to share knowledge and be on the same page, they need to communicate. Also unfortunately, human beings tend to fill in the blanks with their own imaginations. Occasionally, this is even malicious. We often refer to this as gossip.

Therefore, we wanted to offer as much information as possible so everyone can have the same understanding and be able to share the actual narrative both about personnel and the church as a whole.

Here are a few questions and concerns that may need to be addressed:

Why is Tyler no longer going to be a Local Licensed Pastor?

Technically, this all began back in the fall of 2021. Tyler and his family were experiencing an increasingly difficult financial situation that was further complicated with the coming birth of their fourth child. Part of this complication was Tyler's potentially naïve intention to give full-time pastoral work for a part-time salary. Luckily, in 2014, Esther Benfer's home was changed to a parsonage and allowed the family necessary reprieve as well as allowing Tyler to live in the community.

Certainly, it can be claimed that Tyler and his family could have been more diligent with their finances and living arrangements. It can also be claimed that they were irresponsible to conceive a fourth child without being financially viable. However, after 9 years of living on a single part-time income so that Tyler could fully dedicate most waking hours to the work of the church, they knew that changes were necessary.

Why could the church not just pay Tyler more? This is a fair question that needs to be addressed especially as similar – though less healthy – questions have been offered as to why we can't just eliminate other staff positions to offer Tyler a larger salary. The issue is that full-time pastors in the United Methodist Church must also be given a salary package that includes full benefits, namely health insurance. It was not just a matter of increasing salary to a reasonable number – an increase in salary would require the full benefits package (which averages \$80,000 in the United Methodist Church). This is why Tyler and other appointments in the church's history have always been kept under full-time.

In February of 2022, this led to Tyler announcing that his role at The Farmhouse was changing. The letter that Tyler read is still available and it included details on the financial complications and organizational adjustments that were going to occur to make that transition as seamless as possible. At this time, Tracy York was given a role to assist with some of the workload and Amie was given much more pastoral responsibility. Though the extent of the changes were not clear, the decision to lateralize the organizational structure has proven to be helpful as its positive effects have begun to manifest in 2023 – which has turned out to be great timing.

Tyler also expressed that being a formal licensed pastor was never the sole nature of his call to ministry. Though it was not foreseen that his licensing would end the next year, it was explicitly stated that the pastoral nature of Tyler's work was only one dynamic of his call to ministry. It was clear that Tyler's vocation would be different – yet this was always a possibility because of the multifaceted nature of Tyler's understanding of ministry.

At that time, Tyler began looking for potential income opportunities that could supplement his situation while still allowing him to be on staff at The Farmhouse. This initially involved substitute teaching but then led to an opportunity to be part-time staff at Toledo Central Catholic High School. He accepted a position that also allowed him to coach football as he was not asked to be on the new staff at Evergreen High School. The coaching position afforded the professional opportunity to have a second job that was incredibly flexible (thereby allowing him to maintain availability at the church) but also came with the personal advantage of still being able to coach football which has become a meaningful act of ministry in the lives of high school students; not to mention that the coaching opportunity turned out to be both easier and less demanding than Evergreen. Further, being involved in education has allowed Tyler to relationally engage with a demographic that has been important since his own high school experience.

Later in the year, another opportunity surfaced that would allow further financial security and still offer flexibility that utilized an aspect of Tyler's background – Software Engineering. As 2023 began, Tyler was able to go through a training process that would lead to a remote job.

What does this have to do with a pastoral license? Unfortunately, the UMC has a requirement in the Book of Discipline that all licensed clergy must participate in formal education. This rule has always been flexible but was also the cause of some complications back in 2019. The emphasis had been settled but this year the conference decided that it needed to fully enforce this rule again. This time, however, Tyler was not able to appease the requirement because of the time constraints. Tyler would have roughly 3 years left of education to finish his MDiv (which is his only educational path because of his background). There are additional factors to how all of this would need to work, but the outcome is that because Tyler was not able to go back to school without losing one of these jobs or doing so at the expense of his family, the conference did not renew his license (a local pastor's license must be renewed every year via interview with conference leadership).

What are the outcomes of this?

Realistically, the license is not the most impactful change in this discussion. The reality is that back in February of 2022, changes were already needed that would alter how Tyler was able to lead at the church. As those changes have finally come to fruition, it would have been necessary to continue to adjust Tyler's role. The licensure does cause some logistical implications, but the overall adjustments being discussed were likely to happen in some form.

Without the license, these adjustments are happening a little more quickly than we thought and a little more drastically than initially considered.

Technically, a license is necessary to hold an appointment and be considered the primary leader of a church body as well as administer sacraments. Without a license, those are the two main things that Tyler can no longer do. However, you do not need a license to be on staff at a church or to do ministry. Both of those things are technically still possible.

With an expanded array of work, Tyler is also not able to commit the same amount of time to the church. An 80-hour workweek was once normal in Tyler's role. As that is no longer possible, the extent of Tyler's presence and responsibilities are going to be impacted. The license is but a small part of this discussion. Tyler's overall financial situation is affecting this change more than the denominational decision.

Overall, there is an option here where the changes are relatively negligible – Tyler simply doesn't have a license; which was never the primary emphasis of Tyler's ministry in the first place. Outside of the role adjusting, there honestly doesn't have to be much of a difference from how things have been over the past year.

It could also be claimed that the leadership change could be positive. Ten years is a very abnormal length of an appointment in an episcopal, itinerant system. Could it be that the church needs to enter a new season? Could it be that Tyler's leadership style was necessary to get the church to where it is, but might not be the best going forward? In fairness, there has been a growing voice of discontent with Tyler. While these voices have not always communicated this healthily, it is possible to question whether or not leadership adjustments could catalyze the church in the very direction that everyone, including Tyler, wants it to go.

Summary

Overall, Tyler has always discussed being able reach a financial position where he no longer occupied a part of the church's budget. Further, the real dilemma is Tyler choosing to increase his income at the expense of his availability – both to fulfill the denomination's educational requirement and to serve the church in the exact same capacity as he had done for the previous 9-10 years. Tyler is still committed to this particular local church (and has refused other appointments in order to stay here as much as possible) but that has also meant taking on additional work.

Why wasn't I told sooner?

On one hand, there is a certain chain of command that had to be followed. The formal time constraints became known in January – that Tyler's work was going to require the church to finally go all in on what was discussed throughout 2022. The license issue was not known until February 17th, 2023.

At that time, the communication had to follow a pattern. First, the District Superintendent had to confirm the decision. Second, the Conference and Bishop had to confirm the decision. While that happened, no formal announcement could be given and no formal plans could be started. In preparation for what was to come, there was conversation with a very small group of people. While that information was asked to be kept confidential, it was not.

The next step was to communicate with the formal committees of the church – which was not able to happen for a full month after the initial interview. This was done on March 15th, 2023 at the regularly scheduled board meeting. At this point, the information was still not supposed to be announced in any public way, so a board meeting was the best opportunity to tell the formal administration and to do it in a way where they all received the information and could hold discussion together. Again, this was supposed to be kept confidential. It was not.

From there, we were not able to give a formal announcement at church until Tyler had formally met with the District Superintendent. It was proposed that we use April 2nd, 2023 (Palm Sunday) as an opportunity to finally explain these changes as it would be a formal gathering that is typically widely attended and because that was the date of Koen Kleeberger's baptism and would likely have more people than normal. Because the formal appointment status had not yet been approved, we would still have to give a separate announcement once that was confirmed later in April, but the hope was to give people as much information as we could so that we could have less ambiguity. As the information had not been kept confidential, people were starting to fill in the blanks with their imagination. However, Tyler was specifically asked not to make a big deal out of the change and, ultimately, it was requested that he not use that setting to offer an explanation.

That brings us all the way to April 30th. While it does seem like something should have been said sooner, the best we can do is try to explain everything as much as possible and move forward with the decisions that were made about communicating the information.

When did this transition start?

The transition of leadership technically started on March 15th. At this time, Tyler's presence was noticeably different and Amie appeared to be doing more. Despite information not yet being public, we tried to give overarching explanations that coincided with what was said in February of 2022 and thought it was best to begin working toward the change. The apparent changes were also not that different than what was happening throughout 2022 – Amie had mostly done everything at 10:00 for over a year. However, it was deemed best that Amie have as much time to prepare for being the solely appointed clergy and Tyler was asked to be in the background more during this season.

How did the new appointment get decided?

Because of the lack of denominational availability of local licensed pastors in our district that also met the restrictions of our local church and because of Amie's training and participation, it was immediately obvious that the best course of action was to have Amie Brodie – who was already appointed at the church – simply continue as the appointed pastor. A likely alternative was that there would not be anyone appointed. Setting the appointment of someone already familiar with the congregation and who shows higher competency than most local licensed pastors in the denomination was a quick decision.

The District Superintendent recommended the appointment to the Cabinet and Bishop in March and then met with the SPPRC in April to formally recommend Amie Brodie as the appointed pastor of Metamora UMC and The Farmhouse. This was then taken to the church's board on April 19th to affirm the financial proposal of the appointment. The board approved the recommended salary. The appointment formally begins on July 1st, 2023.

What will Tyler's "informal sabbatical" be like?

As stated, local licensed pastors are not given the ability to take sabbaticals. This is a point of contention in the denomination as some feel that local licensed pastors should be given this opportunity. As a concession to the formal rule and because Tyler is still certified with the denomination, the district and conference voted to offer an alternative version of a sabbatical as the appointment changed to offer assistance to Tyler and to allow for a formal period of transition that is common when appointments change. This was described as a six-month sabbatical where the former pastor (Tyler) would be absent from the community and from leadership responsibility to offer a season of discernment to both Tyler and the church. The hope is for the church to affirm its identity and adapt to the changed circumstances and for Tyler to have a distance from the community to disassociate from being the primary pastor and be able to re-enter in a new way. As most pastors never return to their churches once they leave, this break was highly encouraged by the denomination. While Tyler will not be returning in the same capacity, we do hope this will allow him to still be part of our church community in some way – whether with a formal role, as a volunteer, or even just a member of our church – based on what is best for everyone involved.

During the sabbatical, Tyler is technically supposed to be absent. This is also why the transition period is so emphasized – so that the continuing staff can be as prepared as possible and use Tyler as a resource while he is still serving in this capacity. There may be situations where Tyler will be contacted or asked to assist, but these are supposed to be exceptions.

As part of the appointment change, the conference has also deemed Tyler be able to stay in the parsonage as he and his family adjust to new circumstances. The board has approved this decision through at least December 31st, 2023.

Will Tyler still work at The Farmhouse?

Upon completion of the sabbatical, the intention has been that Tyler will continue to have a role at the church and utilize his gifts in whatever way makes the most sense for what is best for the church come January 2023.

However, this role would need to look different so as to allow the new season of the church's life to occur and to reflect the changes in availability. Tyler has expressed that he wants to continue to be a part of this community and hopes that the vision of The Farmhouse will continue. In fact, he believes that the vision is more likely to happen with this change in leadership.

These possibilities will depend on other factors, however. The church would need to deem it necessary to have Tyler in a formal role. Tyler's situation may also continue to change – especially concerning residence – which may further impact availability. At the least, Tyler and his family want to be involved – even if it is just in a volunteer and general participation capacity. At the discretion of the future staff, Tyler would also be available to continue to assist the staff if that is healthy for everyone involved. At this time, Tyler will not be renewing his license and will not be able to act with the formalities of the pastoral role.

In any case, Tyler will no longer be taking a formal salary – partly to help alleviate the financial constraints of the church's budget and partly because it would no longer be necessary. The SPPRC has drafted a potential job description that could be filled by Tyler with potential compensation being the ability to continue living in the parsonage until Tyler's family is able to consider other housing options. That proposed role is available from the SPPRC. At present, the board has not yet voted as to whether they will approve that compensation option.

What will happen with the parsonage?

A parsonage is by definition housing regulated by a church body that is made available as a form of assistance to clergy. Traditionally, these were very important to the sustenance of clergy. In the past several decades, these have become less and less used. At present, Metamora UMC / The Farmhouse is one of the only churches in the Maumee Watershed District that uses a parsonage for its intended purpose. Most parsonages are either rented out or have been sold.

Our parsonage is unique because it is relatively new. The church has not had a formal parsonage since the sale of the parsonage in the village of Metamora. In 2014, a few months after Tyler's appointment began, it was requested if the church would be willing to use the Ministry Center as a parsonage.

At this point, the church does not have appointed clergy to house in the parsonage as Amie Brodie has declined the need for compensated housing and no other appointed clergy are currently proposed to be at the church. The church's administration will need to decide how to

use the building going forward which can range from returning it to a ministry center all the way to renting the building out if it is not decided to accept the SPPRC's proposal to use it as compensation for a staff role. An alternative proposal has been to make it available to rent and offer the rental to Tyler and his family.

If the church does allow Tyler and his family to stay in the parsonage as compensation for a continued role until they find other housing, it would then need to be determined how the house will be used in the future. This could be as a parsonage for potential appointed clergy, as a rental, or for it to return to being used as a general building for the church.

How does this change our financial situation?

While the church's budget is relatively small in comparison to other churches (even other churches of the same size), Tyler's salary was the largest item in the budget. Without his salary, pension, and accountable reimbursement, the budget will decrease by approximately \$45,000 per year (a salary of \$36,600, a pension of \$6405, and an accountable reimbursement package of \$3800). The board has agreed to increase Amie's package approximately \$5700 (a salary of \$30,000 up from \$25,000 and a pension of \$4200 up from \$3500) and has increased Tracy York's salary in reflection of her increased role from \$2400 to \$20,000.

Overall, the church's budget will be more manageable for the time being. However, the hope is that while the financial situation is more manageable, the changes may lead to renewal and the saved funds from Tyler's salary can be used to catalyze other positions or projects.

Will this negatively affect the future of the church?

Depending on who you ask, you'll get a different answer to this question. For some, they believe that Tyler's changes will be negative (even though Tyler could still have a role and still belong to the church). For others, they are very vocal that all current problems with the church would be solved if Tyler were gone. Both responses are extreme and possibly ignorant of the complexities of a church.

It was clear by the surveys conducted in early 2023 that there are both concerns and hope for The Farmhouse. There were vocal outrages expressed at a variety of issues and there was adamant support for the same expressions. The opinions were very diverse.

Amidst the expressions, there was a theme of moving forward. The church is different than it was in 2018 when we came to the building. It's different than it was in 2016 when we started transitioning to The Farmhouse. It's different than it was in 2013 when Rev. Powell passed away and Tyler got appointed as a last-ditch effort that was technically supposed to be to help the church close its doors. It's different than the early 2000s when the church moved to the school or the 1990's or the first years in the old building or the when the church was just a Wesleyan

Class Meeting in the late 1800s. The dynamic of any organization or community is that it continues to evolve.

A change in leadership or structure or identity does not have to be reactive to negative experiences where uncertainty means someone needs to be fired. A church can make changes to these things just to help promote the community to reflect what is different in the lives of people involved and the world that we live in. Could this change dwindle the community back to how it was in 2014 with just a handful of people? Could this change finally bring the church to the desired golden age? It depends on how the church responds.

Come January 2024, Metamora UMC / The Farmhouse could be embarking on a new leg of the journey to continue the story of an almost 180-year-old church that honors the past so as to create a better future. It may be that Tyler was an appropriate leader to move this church into its last season, but might not be the best person to be the appointed pastor anymore. That doesn't have to be negative. We must be careful, however, to assume that Tyler (or anyone else for that matter) is the problem or the answer. If the only reason that Metamora UMC is still alive is because of one person's personality, that it is not a sustainable church. If the only answer to perceived problems is to blame one person or one idea, we will always fail to see the underlying issues that keep us from moving toward thriving.

It must be remembered that the global church is undergoing a difficult season. The church has declined more in the last ten years than any other time of history. The United Methodist Denomination is also undergoing massive complications. Further, this local church has seen the brink of non-existence and managed to venture into new terrain.

Will this change negatively affect the church? If you let it, yes. It could also be a necessary element of the church's story that could help change the trajectory of what is happening to so many churches around us and in the world as a whole.

Let's use this opportunity to keep moving forward. There are many decisions to make, priorities to set, relationships to grow, and ideas to explore. We get to ask what it means to be a church in this place and this time in history and continue to move so that this church can still be thriving 180 years from now. We can use the situation before us to build the Kingdom of God in our rural community and make disciples for the transformation of the world – but it requires continuing to do the difficult work of determining what the church must be today for the sake of the church tomorrow and for the possibility of God's dream for the world.

This current situation will either bring forth a new chapter with new opportunities or will, at best, lead to a stagnant story that dwindles in the pattern that so many churches are going or, at worst, lead to the end of the book for this local church. But that's not dependent on any set of changed circumstances or leadership – that will result based on how the people who make up the church decide to move as the story of the world continues to go on.