

Path Forward Committee

Bethany Church Council Status Report

August 17, 2023

The Path Forward Committee was established by Bethany's Church Council with the following two objectives:

- 1) "Inform and educate our congregation utilizing a knowledge and fact-based process on all relevant issues related to the impasse within the United Methodist Church"
- 2) "Ensuring that the entire membership of Bethany United Methodist will have the opportunity to inform themselves of the details of the differences cited above to equip them to be a part of the path forward for Bethany United Methodist Church in this impasse"

Within these objectives, the Path Forward Committee was to provide the following information:

- 1) Current Status of the UMC
- 2) Status of South Carolina Annual Conference
- 3) Key Issues and Differences
- 4) Options for Affiliation
- 5) Financial Considerations
- 6) Legal Considerations

Following is the Path Forward Committee's report providing the current status of our work to meet the established objectives.

Information Gathering

The Path Forward (PF) Committee met seven times during May/June to investigate and discuss the various issues, options, financial considerations, etc... All PF members were encouraged to do independent research on all sides of this schism. This research was subsequently shared with all PF Committee members via email and/or during meetings and was used to extract unbiased facts to be presented to the Bethany membership.

Path Forward Presentation

A 60-slide power point Path Forward Presentation was developed, reviewed, and agreed upon by the PF Committee. This presentation was divided into the following four topics:

- 1) **UMC and Local Church Organization:** a look at basic church organization and the role of church organization/processes relating to the issues as well as options/path forward.

Questions/Concerns/Comments from SS and Small Group Presentations

Below is a list of questions, comments, concerns provided during Q&A sessions of small group meetings or SS presentations or that were emailed to presentation facilitators following the presentations. Questions provided via e-mail are listed verbatim while questions asked during Q&A sessions were captured by facilitators and are paraphrased.

- 1) What happens to the Bethany Staff if we vote to disaffiliate?
- 2) Who would likely stay and who would likely leave?
- 3) What would our budget look like if we disaffiliate and 1/3 of our members leave?
- 4) A 50/50 vote would be disastrous from a revenue standpoint as many dissenters would leave.
- 5) The GMC seems to be the denomination of choice for many churches that have disaffiliated. Perhaps the committee can explain without bias the differences compared to the UMC.
- 6) Should a straw poll be taken of Bethany membership.
- 7) The only vote that should be taken is the real vote.
- 8) The sooner the vote is taken the better.
- 9) Whatever action Bethany takes this year, we are at least dealing with known factors. Who knows what we will be dealing with after 2024 GC.
- 10) Is there a time limit for Judicial Council members?
- 11) In 2020, who decided who would gather to develop the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation?
- 12) Who are Bethany's delegates to Jurisdictional Conference and General Conference?
- 13) If Bethany disaffiliates, who will own our property and who will keep our senior pastor?
- 14) Are other UM Annual Conferences in favor of same-sex marriages. What are the opposing factions in the UMC now in regards to homosexuality?
- 15) What is the GMC's position on homosexuality as ordained clergy and same sex marriages?
- 16) Did Buncombe Street and Mt Horeb vote to disaffiliate?
- 17) If Church Council votes to begin discernment, does that mean we are disaffiliating?
- 18) Who will be allowed to vote on disaffiliation if we get to that point?
- 19) At what age is someone considered as eligible to vote if a disaffiliation vote is held?

- 20) Do our apportionments pay for our pastor's salary?
- 21) What do our apportionments pay for?
- 22) How will we pay for the disaffiliation costs? Where will the money come from?
- 23) Will Bethany be able to pay all of our expenses if we disaffiliate and lose members?
- 24) Would we lose staff if we disaffiliate?
- 25) The Council of Bishops is ignoring the Book of Discipline. How can that happen?
- 26) It sounds as if the UMC is allowing pastors and bishops to break UMC laws already.
- 27) I never knew that our delegates were not representatives.
- 28) We don't want Bethany to change.
- 29) Bethany will lose members either way. So sad!
- 30) What is the role of delegates to Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conferences?
- 31) How long do delegates serve?
- 32) Can a husband and wife both be delegates?
- 33) Will the delegates poll the church on our position?
- 34) What is Bethany's leadership position on the issues?
- 35) Can we conduct a poll of our congregation to find out what percentage of the people want to disaffiliate?
- 36) When will we know who will be the new bishop for SC Annual Conference?
- 37) What will happen to the small rural churches that may want to disaffiliate but cannot afford to? Will they close?
- 38) Sue Knight class comments were expressing disappointment with UMC leadership in not adhering to BOD. Questions were related to finance and how we would pay for disaffiliation.
- 39) There are 3 paths forward for Bethany to take – how will we decide which path Bethany will take? If it is the church council vote, then when is the meeting at which a vote will be held? Will Bethany members be invited to that meeting?
- 40) When is the next election for Church Council membership? Will new council members be elected in 2024? Who are our current council members? How can we contact them to let them know what our feelings are on this issue?
- 41) If there is a good chance that we will disaffiliate, is anyone looking at the current finances to see if there are funds that we can retain instead of paying out. I know we don't want to disappoint any of the organizations that we support with our money, but unfortunately, disaffiliation requires a lot of money and that is a show

stopper to this process. If we do vote to stay as-is we could then still give the money as planned.

- 42) I am on the conservative side of this issue, so I ask why we are supporting the upper methodist leaders with our funds. If there is any extra that we are not required by Methodist laws to give, then we should conserve those funds for this issue. Currently I have stopped giving to the general fund which helps support methodist leadership but instead give to the building fund since I cannot see giving my money to those who are working against my wishes.
- 43) I would like to know who it is that is pushing these changes within the UMC. Who are they and what positions do they hold in the church organization? If they want something different, why do they have to take mine instead of just going out and getting their own? Are there so many of them that want these changes that there is no one up there to stop them? Two old sayings come to mind 1) All it takes for evil to prevail is that good men and women do nothing. 2) Evil preaches tolerance until it is dominant, then it tries to silence good.
- 44) A congregational mock vote was talked about. I would not hold this until the church Council has voted since Church Council can start or stop this process with their vote.
- 45) Same sex marriages and gay ordinations may not be widespread, but all it takes is just one instance of not following the BOD for the BOD to be meaningless.
- 46) I felt that the presentation was slightly biased towards the progressive side.
- 47) I believe that Bethany leadership is slow walking this issue so that disaffiliation becomes impractical in the hopes that Bethany Traditional believers will remain or that Progressives keep Bethany.
- 48) I have been a member of Bethany for over 50 years and I want it to stay with the UMC.
- 49) I do not want to go to the GMC because there is no clear statement of how they will handle the “everyone is equal” and “racial problems” and the sexuality issue – this could cause the same problems within the GMC that have plagued the UMC.
- 50) If a local church decides to stay United Methodist, if they decide in a few years the affiliation isn’t working, can they disaffiliate at that time and what would it cost to do so?
- 51) We are traditionalist worshippers and will not support a centrist or progressive agenda.
- 52) My concern about group meetings is that only the “loud” voices on either end of the spectrum will dominate the group meetings and therefore the “silent majority” will not be heard.

- 53) I believe that all of the information available is skewed toward the individual beliefs of the writer. It is difficult to sort out what is true.
- 54) One of the things I love about Bethany is our diverse viewpoints. Hearing others experiences and beliefs helps me expand my faith and thinking. Our diversity makes us stronger and able to be the vital church that we are.
- 55) My biggest concerns center around information I have heard/read from very reliable (in my opinion) sources regarding powerful, progressive leaders (Bishops?) in the church pushing their agendas on the UMC. Still, I believe our church should remain UMC until these issues directly affect our congregation.
- 56) I don't want to react to soon or overreact.
- 57) Just so my position is clear – I am wanting to see the current state remain the same at Bethany. I would consider myself a traditionalist but accept some differences/changes – maybe that is a centrist but I am not fully in the middle.
- 58) If we as individuals or as part of God's church allow societal pressures to change our beliefs and practices, we are guilty of going against God and his will.
- 59) I am worried about self-fulfilling prophecy pull out now and numbers become distorted. If a good number of churches pull out early, that leaves more progressive churches than traditional. Therefore, vote would lean to majority progressive and change for UMC. Therefore, would prefer to wait until after 2024 GC to make decision.
- 60) I am concerned that most don't understand that Bethany can't remain the same which is what most seem to want. Either way it goes, there will be change.
- 61) The situation that Bethany is in right now is a lose/lose scenario.
- 62) We consider Bethany UMC "our church" and will remain here as long as the doors are open.
- 63) What is the definition of who is considered a voting member of Bethany. Will children be allowed to vote?
- 64) Is the Bethany membership list clean? If not, will it be cleaned up to remove members who no longer belong?
- 65) One of the reasons we attend is the pastors – we need to know if pastors will remain if Bethany stays or leaves.
- 66) I think it is important to wait until General Conference is over to learn the direction that the UMC is going before I can make any decisions. I love Bethany and want us to do what allows us to glorify God and do his work.
- 67) Why do you say changing our doctrinal standards is extremely unlikely? What is required to change our doctrinal standards?