

Bethany Discernment November Group Meeting (Group #2) 11/5/23

Attendees: 9 members attended

BDC Members: George Howard, Elliot Locklear, Pam Kahl, Sheryl Todd, Tom Jeffries,
Henry Thompson

General

- Meeting led by George Howard
- Opening prayer (Henry)
- Discussed ground rules – open, honest, and civil (George)
- Information provided about Steering Committee role, purpose, and makeup (George and Elliot)
- Introductions
- Closing prayer (George)

Meeting Notes

- **Question was asked about timeline for Bethany regarding discernment and possible disaffiliation.** ➔ Explained the timeline outlined in the Local Church Discernment Process; talked about Church Council vote and its impact on timeline – entered into discernment but no vote until after June 1, 2024. Discussed 2024 separation checklist and its impact on timeline – no official vote until January 2025 resulting in potential Bethany disaffiliation occurring in June 2025. Talked about some of the requirements of separation checklist – providing due diligence information by December 1 and cost information in January (based on 12/31 balances). Discussed details around how actual vote would occur and voting requirements for disaffiliation.
- **Question was asked – if we can't vote until Jan 2025 why do we need to submit documentation by December 2024?** ➔ Explained that required documentation is information that is available and only needs to be compiled and sent. Sending this information does not commit Bethany to a particular path, it just keeps us on track to meet the separation timeline if Bethany ultimately votes to disaffiliate.
- **Question was asked – there is a lot of talk about discernment and unity, what exactly does this mean?** ➔ Discussed that discernment is about Bethany members working to understand (through prayer) what God's desire is for Bethany. Discernment also means providing information to the congregation to enable members to make informed decisions. Unity is what the DSC is trying to promote so that Bethany can continue to do God's work as we go through the discernment process. It is an effort for Bethany members to find common ground in our belief in Christ and our task of making disciples of Jesus – unity is not an effort to lead (or sway) Bethany to leave the UMC or stay UMC.

- **Question was asked – how can unity occur when UMC leadership is not following the BOD which is our main “unifying” instrument?** ➔ Discussed some details about this issue and that this is one of the main issues creating the current schism and causing churches to leave the UMC. It is one of the issues that each Bethany member must determine (discern) for themselves if this issue is sufficient to cause them to want to leave the UMC.
- **Question was asked – will our Bishop still be in charge and if not, will this change our options/ability to disaffiliate?** ➔ Discussed the development of the SCAC Local Church Discernment Process and why it was put into place for SC versus using 2553 being used by the rest of the UMC. Discussed the likelihood that Bishop Holston would probably not be our Bishop after 2024 due to his time in service as the SC Bishop (12 years) and age / mandatory retirement age – stated that we did not know for sure and that it was possible that he could continue due to a possible “covid exemption”. Discussed the possibility that things could change if we got a new Bishop – would still need the approval of the SCAC trustees. Mentioned that this is one of the unknowns and potential risks of our decision to postpone Bethany vote until after 2024 GC.
- **Question was asked about possible changes to costs to disaffiliate** ➔ Discussed potential risks of waiting until 2025 – we know what the costs are for disaffiliation in 2024 but things could change in 2025 (we just don’t know).
- **Question was asked about the impact of this schism on the financial health of Bethany** ➔ T. Jeffries provided information on current financial status of Bethany and comparisons to previous years. Talked about impact of Covid and schism. Discussed options to reduce budget if necessary due to adverse financial impacts.
- **Comment was made about “fear of the unknown” among many Bethany members. This was followed up by comment that God tells us not to be fearful because he is always there with us.**
- **Question/comment was made about not knowing Bethany’s future and “organization” if vote to disaffiliate passed.** ➔ Discussed that Bethany did not need to decide future immediately after disaffiliation – they could remain an independent church for as long as necessary and could continue to follow all of its current practices and keep its current organization until such a time as the congregation decided to make a change.

Summary

- This group was mostly interested in asking questions – some sharing of thoughts and opinions but mostly wanted information
- Asked if all felt meeting was beneficial – all said yes
- Asked everyone to share experience at meeting with friends/family and to encourage others to attend one of the future meetings in November

- Offered to have one-on-one discussions with anyone that would rather talk one-on-one instead of in large or small groups. Told group where/how to find discernment committee contact information in case anyone wanted to contact us directly
- Overall, meeting went well – good discussion that was conducted in an open and civil manner