

Bethany Discernment November Group Meeting (Group #1)
11/5/23

Attendees: 18 in attendance

BDC Members: Greg Cook, Barbara Petrohovich, Rebecca Jackson

Others: Michael Ritter, Senior Pastor; Dave Braddon, Lay Leader, and Delegate to General Conference

General

- Greg Cook led the meeting.
- Michael Ritter had the opening prayer.
- Ground rules were given.
- Stan Petrohovich had the closing prayer.

Notes from the meeting

1. Comment

- a. Cultural values are being brought into personal theology, gay marriage, and clergy as examples.
- b. Many other denominations have been through a similar process.
- c. Too many people have opinions NOT based on fact.
- d. We seem to have a “people who don’t believe what I do are bad” mentality.
- e. It is a forgone conclusion that many things are going to change in the UMC, gay marriage as an example.
- f. The questions people have should not be judged in terms of the current minister; Bethany oversees its worship space. (Church Boards of Trustees approve who can use Church property and for what purpose).

2. Comment

- a. It is important to have the facts.
- b. Why are we leaving? What are the pros and cons?**
- c. What are the financial implications of staying/leaving?**
- d. STARRS website mentioned; retired generals fighting woke mentality.
- e. I am afraid of where we may be heading.

3. Question - Why aren’t we voting now?

- a. Petition's intent was ruled out of order.
 - b. The Church Council voted to have a church vote after the 2024 General Conference and those are the guidelines we must abide by.
4. **Comment** – I am happy here and I want to continue to worship here.
5. **Comment**
- a. We need to turn these issues over to the Lord and we don't seem to be doing that.
 - b. If our leaders decided to wait, then that's what we need to do.
 - c. It is easy to say that but hard to do.
6. **Comment**
- a. Unless something changes, the UMC won't exist in 25 years.
 - b. There seems to be an absence of young people in church; there are none here tonight.
 - c. I noticed the number of candles lit in today's All Saints Service. These individuals seem to be replaced by people of the same general age group.
 - d. **Do we know what God wants?**
7. **Comment** – We need to let God handle this thing.
8. **Question – Do we have a written response to the petition or just emails?** I want an official letter. (At present, there is no official letter from the District Superintendent.)
9. **Question – What are the Annual Conference trustees saying?** We all need to be aware; to listen and to hear what is being said. (Note – The Conference Trustees are the ones that put the current separation rules for the SC Annual Conference in place.)
10. **Comment**
- a. The progressive opinion seems to be demanding that we accept their principles and that appears to be the reality of the situation we are in.
11. **General Comments made on the working of the General Conference and how petitions make it to the floor for vote.**
- Some petitions will be combined with others, and some will not make it to the floor for vote so it is difficult to predict the actual ones that will reach the plenary sessions.
12. **Question about regionalization.....**

- a. Many petitions have been submitted so it is hard to predict what will come out of this topic.
 - b. How will regionalization affect decisions and this church?**
- 13. Question – Do we know what the rules are going to be for 2025?**
- a. We do not. There are many rumors going around but there is nothing concrete we can count on.
 - b. The unknown/uncertainty/timing is what is driving all of us apart.
14. **Comment** – This can has been kicked down the road long enough.
- 15. Comment**
- a. This schism started with a gay bishop being appointed out West.
 - b. Why is due process needed if she is in violation of the Book of Discipline?**
 - c. It appears that cultural “rules” have intervened.
 - d. The UMC churches seem to be forced to make choices. We know what the rules are now, but do we know what the rules are going forward?**
 - e. Clarity is needed in the decision-making process.
16. **Comment** – Both sides have been “politically” active.
- 17. Question – What happened to the petition?**
- a. The intent of the petition was ruled out of order by the Chancellor. Note All Annual Conferences have a Chancellor. All must be UMC members and licensed to practice law in the State concerned. Our Chancellor is a licensed attorney who specializes in church law and is part of a law firm that also focuses on church law.)
 - b. It has been sent to the Bishop.
 - c. The status of the petition remains in limbo.
 - d. Why can the vote not be rescinded as asked by the petition?**
18. **Comment** – I come to the church to be spiritually led and our leadership remains neutral.
19. **Comment** – John Wesley said, “the church is to be judged by the scriptures, not the scriptures judged by the church”.
20. **Comment** – The mainstream UMC has posted information about the 4 main reasons for disaffiliation. NOTE: This group is a 501-3C progressive lobby group not directly associated with the UMC.

21. **Comment** – We have lost contact with Scripture. **Do we believe what the Bible says? Do we believe it is written by men inspired by God?**
22. **Question** – *Will the Charge Conference on November 14 deal with this issue?*
- a. No, this conference is to deal with business matters of the church.
23. **Comment** – I am concerned about changes that almost passed at the last General Conference.
- a. Current costs seem to be reasonable.
 - b. Many left the August 17 meeting disillusioned and there seems to be a lack of trust between members of the church.
24. **Comment**
- a. The UMC left Bethany biblically.
 - b. Seminaries seem to be increasingly progressive as do the ministers they are producing.
 - c. I want a Bible believing and Bible preaching church.
 - d. I was raised that you live by the Bible.
 - e. According to the UMC website, 6 of the last elected Bishops identified as progressive.
25. **Question for those who are in favor of delaying vote: Exactly what are you waiting to see happen? What are the benchmarks you are looking for at the General Conference that will determine your vote?**
26. **Comment** – The UMC still believes in the Virgin birth the resurrection and the other fundamental theological beliefs of Christianity.
27. **Comment** – The Book of Discipline is not being enforced and that causes me problems.