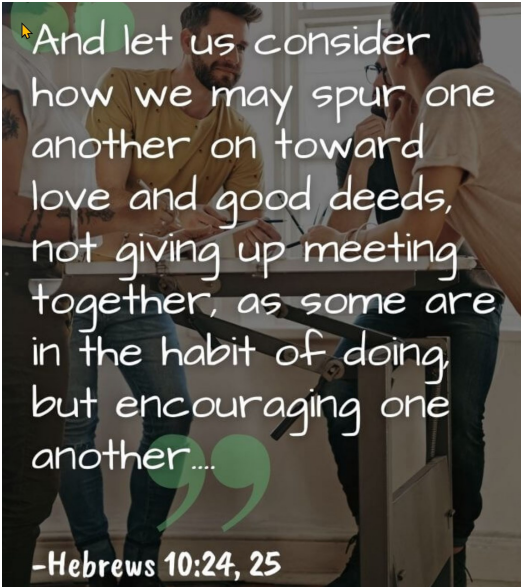


ROAD TO HOLY DISCERNMENT

Doing God’s will....finding common ground.

November 2023
Issue 6



Their values and opinions are important, but God declares that in His Kingdom, nothing is as important as being *united in love*.

The enemy Bethany is fighting is **not intimidated** by a church that is fighting and divisive with one another. Only when we are brought closer together by the love of God and one another are we in perfect unity with God and a threat to the enemy. God values unity and values relationship with each other within Bethany.

The truth, when focused on the person of Jesus Christ, will bring unity and not division.

So how do we begin the process of being in unity with one another? The following is a step-by-step process based on scripture.

Repentance—Humility—Vulnerability—Trust—Communication—Relationships—Christian Unity

Previous issues have dealt with repentance, humility and vulnerability. Today we focus on Trust, Communication and relationships.

Without trust, **true relationship** is impossible whether with God or one another. Even though we know others will fail us at times, and even we ourselves are not always trustworthy, it is precisely because **we know and trust God will never fail us** that we can trust others. Trusting others is almost inseparable from loving others. If we are reluctant to trust anyone to any extent, we are wise to do some introspection and, if necessary, ask God to heal our wounded hearts. To those that have lost our trust, we are called to **demonstrate forgiveness** and often through forgiveness to pursue restoration and a rebuilding of trust over time.

Galatians 6:2 *Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider how to stir up one another in love and good works.*

Hebrews 12:14-15 *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.*

COMMUNICATION As Christians, communication is the **foundation of relationship** with both God through prayer

and with one another. We are called to both build one another up and to edify each other. Speaking the truth in love with open hearts and open minds allows us **to hear** one another and **to be heard** in the way that God intends us to communicate with each other. We are to judge our own evil thoughts by examining our own sins and shortcomings by asking God and those we offend for forgiveness. Even in our differences, how we speak to one another can impact our trust and relationship with each other.

Communication when **centered on love, patience, kindness, and gentleness** demonstrates an earnest desire to understand each other. Finally, we must be sensitive to one another to fully understand what their needs are and how they feel.

James 1:19 *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*

RELATIONSHIPS

Our relationship with one another is a direct reflection of our relationship with Jesus Christ. **Perhaps the most impactful word for building relationships comes from love.**

As Christians we are to help each other grow in our faith, encourage each other, pray for one another, bear with one another and forgive, and most importantly love one another. Through **empathy and understanding** our relationships can grow and be Christ-like in nature often despite our differences. As our **relationship with God matures** so should our Christian relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters. **Through a deepening relationship with God** and one another we can begin to fully demonstrate unity in spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Ephesians 4:12 *With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.*

1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Repentance, humility, vulnerability, trust, communication and relationships leads us to unity with one another. God calls His people to live in unity with one another, so it is important to make every effort to **live together in harmony with everyone**. Regardless of beliefs and differences, God commands us **to do all in love**. It is important to keep in mind the biblical vision of unity that which fails to call us to **repent** of the damage done through our divisiveness with one another. Only through repentance and self-examination can we truly begin the process of Christian unity and resolving anew to love each other as we love ourselves. **Unity demands that we as a church empowered by the Holy Spirit, “actively demonstrate our love for one another which is the perfect bond of unity.”**

John 13:34 *A new command I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*

Romans 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*



Regionalization legislation petitions submitted to General Conference

History

Much like the issues around sexuality, the notion of “*regionalization*” has been around for many years. It has recently gained steam and was brought to the forefront with the development of the so called “**Christmas Covenant**”. The Christmas Covenant was a response to the passage of the Traditional Plan at the 2019 special general Conference. It was created by groups from the Africa and Philippines Central Conferences who were concerned about a split within the UMC. This Christmas Covenant proposed the following:

- Suspension of all actions furthering any dissolution or separation plans and liquidation and distribution of the assets of The United Methodist Church.
- Formation of a U.S. Regional Conference.
- Establishing legislative equality for central and jurisdictional conferences.

Building on the Christmas Covenant, the *Connectional Table* and *The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters* formulated and adopted plans to initiate “**regionalization**” within the UMC. Consequently, the **Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters has officially submitted eight (8) petitions proposing regionalization for evaluation and adoption at the 2024 General Conference.**

Regionalization

The regionalization plan would create a **US Regional Conference and rename the central conferences as regional conferences.** This would result in **8 regional conferences** and still maintain “connectionalism” via the General Conference. The US Regional Conference would be an additional layer of administration for the US as the US structure would be: *General Conference, US Regional Conference, Jurisdictional Conferences, Annual Conferences, and Districts.*

The **General Conference would still be the controlling “body”** and would still meet every four years. However, with

the advent of Regional Conferences, the General Conference would primarily be working on items that affect the UMC globally while the **Regional Conferences would provide oversight for their respective regions.** The US would be one of the 8 regions.

⇒ Regional Conferences **would meet every 4 years** after the General Conference.

⇒ Each Regional Conference would be allowed to **create and manage their own “discipline” within boundaries.**

These boundaries would be determined by the General Conference which would identify what parts of the Book of Discipline would be “adaptable” and which would be “non-adaptable”. For instance, the “Constitution” would be non-adaptable meaning only the General Conference could make changes to the constitution.

⇒ Other items such as the **Articles of Religion, Confessions of Faith, General Rules,** etc. would also be classified as **non-adaptable.** Exactly what would be classified as adaptable by regional conferences is yet to be determined but the adaptable parts would most likely only come from Part VI of the Book of Discipline, (Organization and Administration)

⇒ The parts of the Book of Discipline that deal with **same sex marriages and LGQTB ordination** would almost certainly be determined to be adaptable.

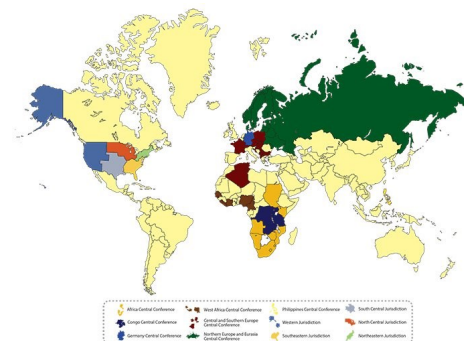
⇒ Under regionalization, the US Jurisdictional Conferences would still be responsible for **electing and assigning Bishops.**

==> Regionalization would require a change to the UMC Constitution. As such, it would require a 2/3 majority vote at GC followed by a 2/3 vote of the aggregate of all Annual Conference delegates.

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/regionalization-legislation-petitions-submitted-to-general-conference>

<https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-future/5-challenges-to-regionalization/>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/united-methodists-will-decide-realigning-churchs-structure-authority-in-2024/>



Those that favor regionalization give the following reasons for support	Those that oppose regionalization give the following reasons for not supporting
Provides more autonomy for the various regional conferences (US specifically) to minister to the needs of those in their region	This is just a means to ensure that the BOD can be changed to allow for same-sex marriages and LGQTB ordinations as well as future "society" conforming changes
Simplifies and streamlines the General Conference particularly for the non-US regions as discussions and legislations at GC are generally dominated by US centric topics/items	The US is afraid of the future since the declining membership in the US combined with the growing membership in Central Conferences means that the 2024 GC will be the last GC where the US will have a majority of delegates
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Percentage of Non-US Delegates at General Conference</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">1980 – 8%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1992 – 11%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2004 – 20%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2016 – 42 %</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2024 – 44%</p>

OTHER DENOMINATIONS HAVE STRUGGLE WITH HUMAN SEXUALITY

THE EPISCOPAL DENOMINATION

Arkansas Democrat Gazette - Frank Lockwood 03/18/2023

In 2003, a gay clergyman was elected as bishop of New Hampshire and was ordained in that position later that year.

Theological and doctrinal differences simmered for years.

In 2012, the Diocese of South Carolina (lead by bishop Mark Lawrence) and most of its clergy and members left the Episcopal Church and joined the Anglican Church in North America. The Anglican Church of North America was a newer, more conservative body.

The national Episcopal Church said they were free to go, but that they would have to leave the diocesan name and church property behind. Multiple lawsuits followed.

Initially, local churches owned their own property. But in 1979, delegates to the church's General Convention declared that property "held by or for the benefit" of parishes, missions, and congregations was "held in trust" for their Church and the Diocese.

In South Carolina, courts ruled that the 1979 ruling could not be used to strip a parish of its property unless the parish had agreed to the provision.

Ultimately, the state Supreme Court made the determination on a case by case basis. Ultimately, the Episcopal denomination only kept a handful.

No longer in litigation mode, the Anglican diocese can shift its attention to spreading the gospel.

THE LUTHERAN DENOMINATION

In August, 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church ratified the 10th social statement at their church wide assembly. This statement basically supported same gender couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection.

In 2010, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Candidacy Manual called on the denomination to make provisions in its policies to eliminate the discrimination against openly homosexual individuals from being ordained.

In 2009, a new Lutheran organization, the New American Lutheran Church, left the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The primary reason for the split was the Evangelical Church's shift in policy toward homosexual members and clergy. The New American Church regarded the shift as being not biblical and symptomatic of growing liberalism of the Evangelical Church.

Read More: <https://classroom.synonym.com/caused-lutheran-church-split-5313.html>

THE PRESBYTERIAN DENOMINATION

Since 2008, several Presbyterian Churches have left the main denomination of the Presbyterian Church (PC) (USA) over theological issues.

In June 2014, the PC (USA) made the decision to allow ministers to perform same-sex marriages in states where it is legal.

The Presbyterian Church prefers local Presbyterys to formulate processes and procedures necessary for dissolution of a congregation. In 2008, their General Assembly passed a resolution on separations called "Gracious Separation."

A congregation can be dismissed with its property to another Reformed body (Calvinism - affirming doctrines of grace to see God as the author of salvation from beginning to the end), or if the congregation seeks to leave the Presbyterian Church without transferring to another Reformed body, then the church will be closed and the dismissal process will be ended. No property transfer.

A church wide vote would be taken to determine the congregations' wishes. At least half of the members should be present, and the vote would have to be at least 75% of those present wishing to separate.

These provisions are contained on the PC (USA) Book of Order.

Read More: https://daltontomich.com/leaving_the_presbyterian_church_the_gracious_separation_policy/

THE UNITED METHODIST DENOMINATION

The Week US by Peter Weber January 5, 2023

By the end of 2023, the United Methodist Church will be less united. The most prominent issues are over same sex marriage and gay clergy. Looking back over the years, the United Methodists have taken some lessons from our fellow protestant denominations - Episcopalians, Lutherans, and the Presbyterians.

The chief lesson the United Methodists can learn from these other splits is that while "no denominational divorce is easy," all of the mainline denominations "are still standing and doing ministry---and so are the new denominations that have struck out on their own."

Read More: <https://theweek.com/religion/1019544/the-widening-schism-in-the-united-methodist-church>

FINAL DRAFT OF REVISED SOCIAL PRINCIPLES RELEASED

The booklet reflects the United Methodist response to today's most pressing social issues and is pending adoption at The General Conference, Charlotte 2024.

The Revised Social Principles document contains six main sections:

- the preface,
- the preamble,
- the community of creation,
- the social community,
- the economic community,
- the political community.

The history of Methodism and its predecessor bodies' commitment to social principles can be found in the preface; the theological convictions of the church are found in the preamble.

1. The document integrates Biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text.
2. Each principle is written in a concise and clear way.
3. The world-wide nature of the church is reflected in all areas of the document.

Read the entire document: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/222>



The Discernment Committee will not be meeting or sending updates during Advent. The four Sundays prior to Christmas follow four weekly themes: hope, peace, joy, and love and ends on Christmas Eve. It is our hope the entire congregation uses this time to reflect on how each of us can prepare our hearts for the birth of Christ.

You will be hearing from us again in January.

2 Corinthians 9:10

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Happy
Thanksgiving

Conversation Sundays with the Discernment Committee

4:00 AND 5:15 sessions!! Come to room 127.

The 5:15 session was added especially for those of you dropping students off for ASCEND at 5:30!

Open conversation every Sunday in November

A time to listen and be heard respectfully!

We keep hearing that the congregation wants to be heard. Come to these meetings and make that possible.

The notes from the November 12 conversations can be reached at the following link:

insert link for Nov 12 files

Our **WHY?**

With each publication of our newsletter, the Discernment Committee will be transparent about our WHY to insure we are working with God's Purpose for Bethany as our focus.

Philippians 4:6-7:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This newsletter is the result of information gathered by various committees working through areas of the discernment process. Its purpose is to ensure that Bethany members have up to date information on the discernment process as well as the many topics affecting the current schism within the United Methodist Church.

If you have questions about the information provided or if you have questions/ comments about any other topic related to our discernment process, please send an

