



## ROAD TO HOLY DISCERNMENT

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

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# What's happening?

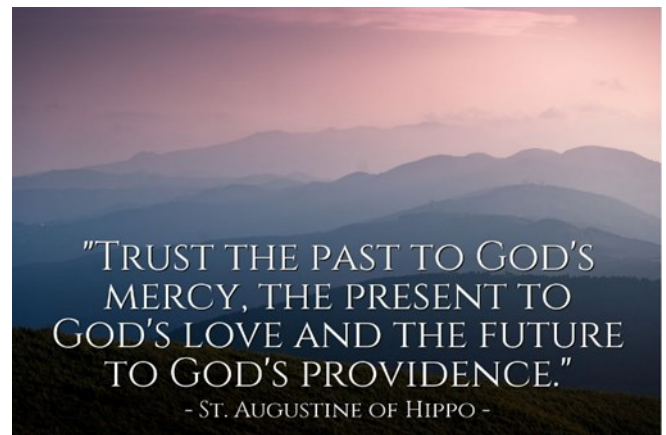
As we start the new year, let's look at where we have been, where we are now, and the road ahead.

God can bring peace to your  
**past,**  
purpose to your  
**present,**  
and hope to your  
**future,**

**Where have we been** ..... last year was undoubtedly a tough year for our congregation as we began to discuss the schism within the UMC and its impact on Bethany. The Path Forward committee was formed and provided basic information to Bethany's members on the schism issues and Bethany's options. The Bethany Church Council voted in August to officially enter a period of discernment with a potential vote to separate occurring no sooner than June 1, 2024. A Discernment Steering Committee (DSC)

was formed in September and began providing tools (prayer, information, leadership, etc.) to enable the Bethany congregation to navigate through this uncharted time of discernment while maintaining our Christian fellowship and Bethany's mission to make disciples for Christ.

**Where are we now** ..... In order to focus on the celebration of the birth of Christ, the DSC suspended discernment related activities (other than prayer) during the Advent season. After taking this break for Advent, the DSC and discernment subcommittees met for the first times in 2024 on January 10 and January 17. The objective of these meetings was to lay out plans for the time between now and the UMC General Conference to be held April 23 – May 3, 2024.





**The road ahead** ..... the time between now and the 2024 General Conference will likely be a period when there will be minimal new “news”. However, there will no doubt be a fair amount of speculation and conjecture in the coming months about what may happen at General Conference. During this time, the DSC and subcommittees will continue to provide information and education to Bethany’s congregation. We will be working to get feedback from the SC An-

nual Conference Chancellor on the petition that was submitted by Bethany members last year as well as the letter sent to the South Carolina Annual Conference (SCAC) Trustees by the DSC asking for clarification on several items related to the future of the SCAC Local Church Discernment Process. Our focus for the next few months will be directed at what we believe as United Methodists, methodism in general, and Bethany specifically. Prayer for God’s guidance and Christian unity will continue to be the cornerstone of our discernment process.

After the 2024 General Conference has been held, we will have a better feel for the path that the UMC will be following into the future. After the 2024 General Conference has concluded, we will have a better feel for the path that the UMC will be following into the future. Once we know what occurs at GC, then we should be in a position for the Bethany membership to determine if they wish to remain on the future UMC path or to follow a different path.

## ***Maintaining Unity in Our Church***



Although the church is supposed to be a united body, the incredibly high number of church splits and number of denominations can make this seem an unrealistic goal. How, then, are we to maintain spiritual unity?

If the Christian life was merely a series of doctrines to stand for, there would be plenty of room for argument and division. But Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1, *“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”* A better translation is that we are **to walk worthily of our calling**. God designed the Christian life as not merely a worldview but a spiritual walk that allows us to grow in intimacy with Him; the Holy Spirit transforms us into people who *“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...”* (Ephesians 4:3).

Paul lists **four relational qualities** we are to grow in as part of our spiritual walk.

- ◇ First, there is **humility**, which is a disposition towards ourselves. The essence of humility is a heart willing to embrace lowness. It is not self-debasement but putting the focus on God, recognizing that all we are and all we have comes from Him and His grace.
- ◇ Secondly, we are to be **gentle**, which is a disposition towards others. Regardless of whether we get along with someone or agree with their decisions, we are to be caring, considerate and understanding in our dealings with them.
- ◇ Thirdly is **patience**, which is a disposition towards our circumstances. Patience often involves people, but we also need it when we find ourselves in circumstances that are not working out as we want or plan. Having patience means trusting that in every situation, God will work out His good and perfect will in His time in His way.
- ◇ Lastly, we are **to bear with one another in love**. There will be times when we find it difficult to deal with other believers.; it is why we need to be walking and progressing in humility, gentleness, patience and love.

This is not growth with the expectation that we will reach a perfect state on earth but that we *allow God to work in our lives so that these godly characteristics are being continually developed in us.*

When divisiveness occurs, it is often because at least one of these four qualities are lacking or absent. **If we find ourselves struggling to get along with others in the church, it is worth asking ourselves if we are humbly, gently, patiently, and lovingly making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.** When we each take that step back to reflect on our own hearts, we can begin dealing wholesomely with those issues that may be dividing us.