



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Empowering churches to proclaim the reconciling love of Christ.

A Message from PCC

May 27, 2020

Dear Friends of Penn Central Conference -

"And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best..."

(Philippians 1:9-10a, NRSV)

This is a time of decision-making. Many among us are daily weighing options related to time in the midst of pandemic. Some are rather benign (do I really need 5 bottles of hand sanitizer?) while others are more serious (how many can we seat in the sanctuary while keeping social distance?). I too have been weighing options, considering possibilities, talking through ideas with the Penn Central staff, and generally trying to make my way forward through a time that requires a great deal of navigational skills.

I'm grateful in the midst of all this to be reading Susan Beaumont's book, *How to Lead when You Don't Know where You're Going* (Roman & Littlefield, 2019). For a title that sounds almost flippant, this is a weighty book with great insight. Beaumont has pushed me to think carefully about the difference between decision-making and discernment. And that word – discernment – has also been floating around quite a lot in conversations these days. And I stand convinced that in these days we need more discernment, even though we long for decision-making.

Decision-making is our familiar terrain. It involves clear, logical thinking. To make good decisions we collect data, weigh evidence, evaluate alternatives and run meetings with parliamentary procedure. It's action-based and helps to restore order. Quickly. Decision-making feels good. We have direction and a goal. We know where we are going. No wonder we favor it.

Discernment is different, Beaumont writes, because "the participants adopt a stance of indifference to anything but the will of the divine as discovered by the group." (pg. 72) And if we are being asked to wait upon the will of God, then we may not move in the same way as we do in decision-making. Discernment takes time, requires putting off personal certainty, shedding ego, and an

abundance of prayer and conversation. If you were raised Quaker, you probably know how to do it well. But for most mainline Protestants this can be difficult work. Discernment requires a slower pace, careful consideration of other's perspectives (and releasing our own), a willingness to be in prayer with others, and a great deal of humility. It doesn't abide by Robert's Rules, but creates space in which God's Spirit will work and become manifest.

I lift up the difference between the two because this is a time in which we may need to temper our decision-making with discernment. Consistories, councils, elders and pastors are making decisions about re-gathering in buildings (when? how?). We want to make decisions quickly. However, we do not know what lies ahead in terms of this virus and how it may re-emerge. This is a liminal season – a time between. We know what the past looked like (we miss it, after all), but we do not yet know what the future holds. Uncertainty surrounds us. Liminal seasons call for more discernment. For taking our time, listening for God's direction and the Spirit's urging.

In the days to come, take a deep breath. Resist the urge to jump into decision-making. Join with others as the apostles did. Pray together. Consider the most vulnerable. Take your time. Seek the guidance of the Spirit, as Paul says, "to help you determine what is best."

Peace,

Carrie

Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

Redeemer's UCC, Littlestown

St. Luke's UCC, Lock Haven

Sandy Hill (Kistler) UCC, Loysville

St. Peter's UCC, Lykens