



## BETHANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

January 27, 2016

Dear Bethany members and friends,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to invite you to some special events in which Session and I believe God will address us and empower us to embrace Bethany's future together. As most of you know there are diverse views at Bethany regarding gay Christians in the life of the church. We currently function within policies set forth in Bethany's Holiness and Leadership statement, which recognizes marriage between a man and a woman as the only place God blesses sexual intimacy. Growing out of some conversations with church members, the Session has decided that Bethany needs to come before the Lord to discern how we can be the Body of Christ together in the midst of our differences.

We will be led by Renewal Ministries Northwest in a four phase process of communal discernment, *Listening for God's Leading*. Details on *Listening for God* are enclosed. I want you to mark your calendar for two Saturday retreats on our church campus, **March 5** and **May 14**. At these retreats we will first be equipped in spiritual discernment and then actively engage in this discernment together.

### **Listening for God's Leading**

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* Isaiah 43:19

- **March 5, 8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., “Equipping In Communal Discernment.”**
- April 30, *Session Only: “Appreciative Inquiry and Framing the Question”*
- **May 14, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., “The Discernment Weekend”**
- June 18, *Session Only: “Clarify and Distill”*

Session is very enthused about this discernment process that fits so well with our DNA as a scripture-immersed, prayer-driven, Christ-centered, and Holy Spirit-led church. We expect Jesus to speak to us. We actually expect to hear something. The risk in this process is two-fold. First, we do not know exactly what question we will bring to God. It may be something like this: “Given our diversity of views and convictions, what, God, are you saying to us about our call to be ministers of the gospel to our community?” or perhaps “Where are you leading us, God, given our current situation and how do you want us to follow you together? We simply do not yet know the question we will ask of God. Second, we do not know what the Holy Spirit will say to us.

If you are on the more liberal side of this issue and feel like your voice and your spiritual ears are not welcome in this process, think again. We need you. If you are on the more conservative side of this issue and feel like your perspective and spiritual antennae are not vital, reconsider. We need you.

We had 120 people participate in our November and January Roundtable discussions and we expect even more to attend the March and May Saturday retreats. I hope you will be among them. Childcare will not be available on the campus. However, Acts 4:32 funds are available to families who need financial assistance for child care. Please read the attached details of the *Listening for God's Leading* schedule along with information about our facilitators. You can register through the church's website; the registration deadline is February 28<sup>th</sup>. And please mark your calendar now for a season of prayer, waiting, and discovery as we follow the God who indeed makes a way when we see no way. See you on March 5<sup>th</sup>.

In the peace of Christ,  
Pastor Doug Kelly



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## Listening for God's Leading

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### **Our Context:**

For 19 centuries the Christian Church has viewed homosexual behavior as contrary to God's intent, design and will for human sexual relationships. Up through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western culture shared this posture on same gender sexual relationships. However, beginning in the 1960s and accelerating rapidly in just the last 10 years, there has been much conversation and significant movement both in our society, Western culture in general, and in the church. Recently the U.S. Supreme Court established a constitutional right for same-gender marriage. Our own denomination has made changes to the Book of Order to allow ordination to church office and marriage for those in same gender relationships. Bethany currently functions within policies set forth in the Holiness and Leadership statement, which recognizes marriage between a man and a woman as the only place God blesses sexual intimacy. Within Bethany, there is a diversity of opinion on this matter and we need a process to discern what Jesus would say to us in our situation to empower us to move forward together as the Body of Christ.

### **The Process of Discernment: How Are We Going to Listen to God Together in our Present Context?**

We will enter a four phase process led by *Renewal Ministries Northwest*. In this scripture-immersed, prayer-driven process, we expect Jesus to speak to us as we bring a question to him that our Session will frame. We will be equipped in the Christian practice of discernment and will journey through it, listening to the God together whom we believe will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert for us as we, in our divergent views, embrace a future together.

The congregation is asked to attend two Saturday events: *(detailed on back page)*

- **March 5, 8:30 – 2:00**, *"Equipping In Communal Discernment."*
- **May 14, 8:30 – 4:00**, *"The Discernment Weekend"*

**Introductory Comments from Renewal Ministries:** "We trust this process will enable you to be attentive and open to the way in which God, through the Spirit of Christ, is speaking into the question that is before you. It is our hope that by the end of this process, both the congregation and leadership will grow in their practice of spiritual discernment – that is, listening to the voice of Jesus for life and ministry. And, that you will hear from God!... Over the years we have served many churches in our region. Each time we do this, we are greatly encouraged! Every time without fail, our Lord comes and reveals a clear pathway forward that is Spirit-inspired and hopeful for all involved."

# Listening for God's Leading

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## The Four Phases

### **Phase One: "Equipping in Communal Discernment" - Congregation and Session**

***March 5, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (Gather at 8:30 a.m.)***

Teach and equip the congregation and leaders in the time-honored practice of listening to God through prayer. This will consist of two parts. First, we will teach and engage everyone in prayer practices, using a guided "prayer retreat." Second, we will provide teaching on the actual practice and process of communal discernment. A prayer guide will be provided for everyone to use daily, leading up to a time of guided discernment. (Listening groups following this retreat are a possibility.)

### **Phase Two: "Appreciative Inquiry and Framing the Question" - Session Only**

***April 30, 9:00– 3:30 p.m.***

The Session will engage in a process of *Appreciative Inquiry*. We will consider and identify the particular gifting of your church by asking: "How has God uniquely gifted Bethany Presbyterian Church?" We refer to this as your "charism." Why do this? Because as you look to the future, God will guide you into something fresh and new, but it will be *in continuity* with how God has already gifted and called this church. There will be a continuity of the Spirit's work, past, present and future. Also during this session, we will *frame your question for discernment*.

### **Phase Three: "The Discernment Weekend" - Congregation and Session**

***May 14, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Gather at 8:30 a.m.)***

The congregation and all leaders will gather for a time of communal spiritual discernment. We will guide you through a process that enables you to listen to God together around the question that was framed during Phase Two. This will take place in small groups. During this day, we will *distill* the results of what we heard. This will be used for the Session to engage in further discernment, which is Phase Four.

### **Phase Four: "Clarify and Distill" - Session Only**

***June 18, 9:00 – 4:00 p.m.***

The Session (including elders just completing their terms) will listen to God together using the results of the discernment process of the congregation. The purpose in Phase Four is to *clarify and distill* what God has said. During this session we will work together on next steps (how), based on what we have heard from the Lord.

**Cost:** The cost for all four phases is \$5,000. A Bethany member has donated these funds.

## **Information about Renewal Ministries Northwest** ([www.renewalminnw.org](http://www.renewalminnw.org))

Founded in 2003, Renewal Ministries Northwest (Covenant Partner with Northwest Coast Presbytery) seeks to immerse the people of God in Scripture and prayer in such a way that they experience the deep, transforming work of the Spirit of Christ, providing healing, direction, and renewed spiritual vitality for everyday life and ministry by:

- Providing time and space apart from the complexities of daily life to experience God's attentiveness and healing love, and to listen to the voice of Jesus.
- Integrating biblical teaching with guided prayer; connecting mind and heart.
- Recapturing time-honored spiritual rhythms and prayer practices of the church of Jesus Christ including solitude, silence, extended retreat, and meditation on Scripture.
- Teaching the art of spiritual discernment, drawing upon the wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola, and other classical spiritual writers of the church.
- Cultivating awareness, faith, and trust in the Holy Spirit as the personal presence and power of Christ at work in us and the world.

## **Information about the Facilitators**

**Reverend Dianna Kunce** is a native of Ohio. She moved to Seattle in 1980, where she has enjoyed a full and rich life in the Northwest. She finds great joy in relationship with her siblings and much-loved nephew and nieces.

She worked on several university campuses as a Counselor and Instructor and had a Counseling Practice with adults. As a pastor she has served three congregations: University Presbyterian, White Rock Presbyterian, and North Creek Presbyterian Church, where she is currently a Parish Associate.

She is a Co-founder, Co-director, and Spiritual Director for Renewal Ministries Northwest. Dianna holds a degree in Psychology, a Masters in Social Work with an emphasis on Clinical Counseling-Psychology, and a Masters of Divinity from Regent College. She is an ordained minister in the PC(USA) and a member of the Northwest Coast Presbytery.

As a pastor and spiritual director, Dianna is deeply devoted to helping others to foster attentiveness to God's presence and leading in their lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In her ministry with individuals, pastors and Christian leaders, she assists them with developing rhythms and practices that help them create margins, slow down, and allow God to attend to their souls; to be newly inspired and invigorated. She is deeply committed to providing safe pathways that lead people into transformative encounters with God. Honest dialogue with God, themselves, and others will open them to the renewing work of the Spirit, empowering them to "walk in the Spirit" and thereby enjoy freedom, wholeness, joy, and peace in Christ.

**Reverend Denise Easter** grew up amidst the agricultural abundance of the Yakima Valley. She enjoys rich relationships with her three brothers and thoroughly loves being an aunt to four nieces and two nephews.

Her career began as a social worker in long-term care settings and later in several hospitals in the Puget Sound region. She began exploring a call to pastoral ministry while working at University Presbyterian Church in a ministry supporting families with critically ill children. She served in a pastoral

role at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Anacortes and is currently a Parish Associate at North Creek Presbyterian Church.

She is a Co-founder, Co-director, and Spiritual Director for Renewal Ministries Northwest. Denise holds an undergraduate degree in Social Welfare and a Master's degree in Social Work. She is a licensed clinical social worker in the State of Washington. She holds a Master of Divinity degree from Regent College. She is an ordained minister in the PC(USA) and a member of the Northwest Coast Presbytery.

As a pastor and spiritual director Denise is passionate about assisting others in discerning ways to open themselves to God's presence and activity. She believes that as we grow in our experience of God's love for us, we become more awakened to God's creative work in and through us. Denise is excited about assisting individuals, pastors, and Christian leaders in living from their true selves and to experience the Spirit of Christ doing things through them that surpasses anything they could do on their own accord.

## Endorsements and Quotes

— Eugene Peterson, Presbyterian Minister, Translator of *The Message* and Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

*“Renewal Ministries is a ministry of the church for the church. In our increasingly secularized culture sometimes we need a discerning word from attentive and alert friends to chart our way, make decisions, and hear a fresh word of encouragement. RMNW provides a wise and personal presence for us. I heartily recommend what they do.”*

— Charles Ringma ~Emeritus Professor, Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

*“The churches in the Western world are struggling with deepening the spiritual life of its members in our 24/7 consumer culture. This vital ministry seeks to assist the churches in this task by conducting retreats and providing other services to help Christians gain spiritual practices, healing, and formation that will facilitate growth in well-being and wholeness. The vision that this personal growth will spill over into various forms of Christian service in consistent with a Kingdom of God vision where those blessed by the grace of God, the love of Christ and the nurturing work of the Spirit will become the healing hands of Christ for others.”*

— Rev. Dr. Neil Trainer, ~Pastor Calvin Presbyterian Church, Shoreline, WA

*“When our church's leadership needed to discern how God was guiding us into a new season of ministry, we looked to Renewal Ministries Northwest for help. RMNW gave our elders a foundation in community discernment, and then led us through a one-day retreat where we heard God direct our next steps. When it later became clear that our congregation also needed to address places where people had become wounded, we again turned to RMNW. In another retreat with our full leadership team, RMNW helped us do the difficult work of acknowledging where we had abandoned one another, but also joyfully recommit ourselves to a ministry of reconciliation. Nothing has been more significant for our congregation's leaders than following the voice of Jesus, and RMNW has repeatedly helped us do it.”*