

A Word from Woody . . .
“What a Difference a Year Makes!”

It is appropriate as we begin a new year to sit back and get our bearings. Where have we been? Where are we now? Where are we going?

Where were we last year at this time? If you are into the stock market, you probably remember investment and retirement accounts were soaring at impressive heights. COVID was on the rise, with a highly contagious variant—but thankfully less potent-- going around. In the early days of 2022 I endured my second bout with the virus, as did many of you. Louisiana’s favorite adopted son Joe Burrow—I mean, Burrow—was leading his Cincinnati Bengals through the NFL playoffs on their way to the Super Bowl. We were anticipating what was expected to be an historic General Conference of The United Methodist Church in the late summer. It was at this Conference that the Protocol agreement—supported by some bishops and all caucus groups-- would be hopefully passed, thus allowing UM churches an easy exit from the denomination. We were known as Lake Vista UMC, as we had been for the previous 73 years. Only one church in the Louisiana Conference had disaffiliated. And there was no such thing as the Global Methodist Church (GMC).

So where are we now? The stock market fell at a precipitous rate in 2022, and we are thankfully experiencing some recovery as 2023 commences. COVID is still a problem in China, but it is generally not a serious factor in the U.S. or the rest of the Western world. Joe Burrow is still without a Super Bowl ring. In March, 2022 a significant “bomb” was dropped on The UMC—General Conference was postponed until 2024. This triggered a host of reactions. For one, the widespread support across all caucus groups for the Protocol agreement started showing significant collapse. Many bishops and theologically left caucus groups pulled out. Thus, the Wesleyan Covenant Association decided it was time to launch the GMC on May 1, 2022. Another reaction to the postponement of General Conference is that many conservative UM churches sought to take advantage of a temporary provision in the Book of Discipline—called paragraph 2553—to disaffiliate from The UMC with their property. As of July 1, 2022 we are no longer Lake Vista UMC, as our new name is Lighthouse for Christ Church, a name I admit I am still struggling to say. We are one of 70 churches in the Louisiana Conference which have disaffiliated, and we are the only one in the city of New Orleans proper. It

has been reported that over 2,200 of the roughly 32,000 UM churches have disaffiliated so far. There are eight churches from Louisiana which are members of the GMC. We are currently an independent church, and I am ordained in the GMC.

So, what can we expect to happen in 2023? Here are my predictions. As with many of you, I am cautiously optimistic that the stock market will rise and inflation will drop. COVID will increasingly become a distant, distasteful memory of the past, and many of us will struggle not to feel superior to those who still wear masks at the grocery. There will be only one more opportunity for Louisiana UM churches to disaffiliate, and that will be at Annual Conference in June. When paragraph 2553 expires on December 31, 2023, I expect there to be about 100 churches from a total of a little over 400 churches in the Louisiana Conference to disaffiliate. We will remain the only UM church in New Orleans to do so. And Lighthouse for Christ Church will finally be able to return to a full year of normal ministry, unhindered by COVID and disaffiliation. Thus we look forward to our first Vacation Bible School since 2019! To help us prepare for 2023 ministry we will have our Winter Retreat on Friday, February 10th - Saturday, February 11th. Our speaker is the Rev. Dr. Lloyd Harsch, Professor of Church History and Baptist Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. His topic for the weekend will be, "What Does It Mean to Be the Church: Past, Present, and Future." We will meet in our Fellowship Hall as we did last year, and we will follow our usual schedule for the retreat, that basically looks like this: Friday from 6:00-8:30 PM, with supper served, and Saturday from 9:30 AM-12:00 Noon, with lunch served. Costs and other details are forthcoming. Please be sure to make plans now to attend, and invite friends!

As we enter 2023 more fully let us remember these wise words from Proverbs. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (3:5-6).

Love in Christ,

Pastor Woody

P.S. Oh-- one more 2023 prediction: the winning quarterback for Super Bowl LVII on February 12th will be Joe Burrow, and he will continue to experience pressure from the Bayou State to change the spelling of his name to Burreaux. Remember, you heard it first here. . .