

Lenses: How to Interpret this Moment

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I need new glasses. Over time, my eyes have changed, and my lenses are no longer clear. I didn't notice it happening. They are still better than my natural vision; they still help me make better sense of what I see. But they are no longer the right lenses. I need new ones to properly see what lies before me.

Through what lens should we view our upcoming Church Conference? I want to take a few moments to help us faithfully frame this moment in the life of our church. I'll be sure to share my perspectives on the issues at hand at another time, but we also need to take some time and think about what we're doing when we have a Church Conference vote. As I've asked around, this may be the first Church Conference our congregation has had in a generation or more. Sure, we've had Charge Conferences every year (those are different because they are not made up of every full member of the church). So, it's hard to interpret this moment and see it through the proper lens.

Lens: This is a corporate act of discernment. The word "vote" reminds people of governmental elections and all the activities, feelings, and other matters that go along with them. Let's put on a different lens by using Biblical narrative instead. Throughout Acts, the church made many decisions. In Acts 1, for example, they chose a new apostle. They prayed continuously, sought scripture, and then the community put forward two nominees. They chose by lots, trusting God's work in it. In Acts 6, a difficult matter arose, and the body of the church made choices about who would help them serve. In Acts 15, the church had a major decision about what to require of Gentile Christians. After prayer and holy conversation, they made their choice. They say, "*it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...*" as they outline their ethical boundaries.

Someone can win or lose an election, but there is no winning or losing corporate discernment. What is there, then? Direction. In each of the examples above, the church engaged in scriptural reflection, deep conversation, information, prayer, personal searching, and a point of decision. We have been following this model. In the same way, the Acts church trusted God to guide the decision and the outcome. We are doing the same. We are the body of Christ, not opposing parties. We seek divine clarity together. We will receive direction. And we will care for one another's hearts every step of the way, before and after March 13th, as we always have.