

Sermon for 3 May 2026 at Bethesda United Methodist Church/Baltimore, Maryland
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Scriptures: Acts 7:53-60; Psalter: Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 (*Alternate leader, people*); 1 Peter 2:2-10;
John 14:1-14

Sermon:

First of all: On behalf of those who attended our 10:30 service last Sunday, it was a joy and pleasure to hear Rev. Sarah Schliechert, our district superintendent, preach; and speaking for the whole congregation of Bethesda, it was a privilege to have her here in response to our invitation to come and guide us through our One Church meeting in its service as our Pastor/Parish Committee after the 10:30 service..

Beyond that, Reverend Schliechert followed up this past week by sending Charles and me, as SPRC Chair and pastor, respectively, copies of a document called "Beginning Well: Creating The Path for An Excellent Appointment ...This Is a Day of New Beginnings."

I'm going to take most of my time this morning reading you all this document.

Read document, answer questions. [See below.]

Then close with reflecting on the scriptures assigned for today:

First, the stoning of Stephen. It's a powerful reminder that no work of renewal in religious life is easy or safe. The temptation to resist change is highlighted with the potential to fight back, be certain of our righteousness, and forget the Golden Rule.

I see this Sunday in the lectionary as a call to loving above all, beginning with our neighbor and summed up with our dependence on the Spirit.

The second lesson, part of Psalm 31, reminds us how basic that point has been from the beginning for both Israel and Christianity... and how constant our attention to that needs to be.

The third lesson, from First Peter, beautifully spells out these ideas: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people...

...like newborn infants..." We may think we're old, and think of ourselves as a hundred-year-experienced congregation ... but new issues keep arising, and old ones leave their mark, wherever Jesus comes and lives among us...

And finally, the reading from John personalizes our prayer life beautifully. The truth is always coming to us, folks. Jesus is more real the more than we ourselves become real, as we develop and forgive and accept forgiveness and grow more truly God's potential for us, individually and together ...

Let us pray.

Lord, lead Bethesda forward, and whatever comes next, and however we handle it as individuals and as a fellowship, let it be redeeming for all...

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

Beginning Well: Creating The Path for An Excellent Appointment This Is a Day of New Beginnings

The bishop and cabinet have worked hard to affect an excellent appointment that will be a blessing to the community, congregation, and pastor. The next step in this process is a good onboarding between the pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). This step is pivotal in establishing agreed upon expectations, avoiding misunderstandings, and creating the basis for an objective evaluation.

The Beginning Well Resource has been designed to help facilitate this process. The district superintendent will introduce this document during the take-in. The pastor and SPRC will hold additional meetings to discuss, negotiate and perfect the document. It is to be completed, signed, and presented during the first Church Conference held after the appointment has been fixed at annual conference (or at a designed time if the appointment is off cycle).

It is important for a congregation and pastor to approach this appointment as a new beginning. While both have expectations and experiences, both will need to compromise and work together to create a healthy, sustainable, collaborative ministry setting. If there are items contained in this resource that do not apply to the current ministry setting, feel free to overlook them. We hope this resource contributes to an excellent new beginning.

***THIS IS A GUIDE. Please create a written covenant that both the pastor and SPRC sign and turn into the District Superintendent no later than the first annual Church Conference together.

Items for Negotiated Understanding:

Office Hours

Visitation Expectations

- Sick and Shut-ins
- Hospitalizations

Establishing Rhythms of Self-care and Wellbeing

- Day of Sabbath
- Weeks of Vacation

Bible Studies & New Member Classes

- Number of Bible Studies Per Year/Quarter
- Frequency of New Member Classes

Worship Planning

- Pastor's Worship Retreat
- Reading and/or Sermon Preparation Days

- Sermon Series Preparation

Official Committee Meeting Expectations

- Which committee meetings will the pastor attend?

Financial Matters

- Designation of Housing Allowance (if applicable)
- Pay Cycles and Modality (check vs. electronic)
- Income (tax) documentation