



Michigan Conference

The United Methodist Church

FAQ – Virtual Annual Conference 2020

The Commission on the Annual Conference Session

May 07, 2020

Why is the Annual Conference Session being rescheduled?

The COVID-19 epidemic has infected nearly 45,000 persons in Michigan and resulted in more than 4,000 deaths. Members to the Michigan Annual Conference include a majority of persons considered by the world and Federal health officials to be at higher risk for becoming infected. Because the Annual Conference requires months of pre-planning, and we do not know how safe it will be to hold in-person meetings in the foreseeable future, the decision has been made to hold a virtual event. The Annual Conference will be planned in a manner that allows as much participation as is possible during these extraordinary times without placing lives at risk.

When is the virtual Annual Conference?

Annual Conference 2020 will be held in segments between Sunday, July 26, and Wednesday, July 29. *Sowing Seeds: Rooting, Tending, Reaping*, will use online platforms and telephone conference calls to allow as many members as possible to participate. It begins with a virtual opening worship service on Sunday, July 26, 7:00 PM EDT – 8:30 PM EDT, which will also include a time of memorial. On Monday, July 27, there will be two business sessions to discuss legislation, 9:30 AM EDT to 12:30 PM EDT, and again from 1:30 PM EDT to 4:30 PM EDT. On Tuesday, July 28, Clergy Session will be held virtually from 9:30 AM EDT to 12:30 PM EDT. Annual Conference will conclude on Wednesday, July 29, with the Service of Recognition, Commissioning and Ordination from 7:00 PM EDT to 8:30 PM EDT. Planning and safety protocols are still being refined, but those being Commissioned and Ordained should plan to be present in-person with Bishop David Bard for the laying on of hands.

How will virtual Annual Conference work?

Details are still being worked out, but the Commission is aware that members to Annual Conference have varying levels of access to the internet and technology. For these reasons, members will receive legislative materials in printed form that will be mailed four weeks before the first online session. The mailing date will provide ample time for materials to arrive as we know the postal service has experienced delays. The online sessions will be on a secure platform, and those without access to the internet will be able to listen to the session by calling in on a toll-free telephone number. For those without access to reliable internet, the Commission recommends finding a location now with improved access that still allows you to social distance and view the sessions.



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How will we vote?

Every voting member to Annual Conference will receive a legislative guide and paper ballot by mail. These will be mailed approximately 30 days prior to the start of the virtual Annual Conference. Following the online business sessions, you are encouraged to vote and then return the ballot in the prepaid envelope. Envelopes must be postmarked between July 27 and August 1, 2020, to be valid. We anticipate all ballots postmarked during the timeline will be received by August 31. The ballots will then be counted by Conference Secretary Rev. Joy Barrett and Bishop Bard will announce the results before Labor Day.

Will there be a Memorial Service?

Yes. The Memorial Service will be part of opening worship on Sunday, July 26, 7:00 PM EDT – 8:30 PM EDT, to honor those we have lost.

Will there be a time to honor those retiring?

Yes. We will recognize those who are retiring in 2020 during our afternoon plenary session on Monday, July 27. A fuller celebration will be held online at a later date so that the entire Michigan Conference can join in expressing their appreciation.

Will you still be receiving an Annual Conference offering?

Yes. We will still be addressing the humanitarian crisis in Liberia and Haiti by receiving a shared offering. This year's offering will be shared between three organizations. The Bishop Judith Craig Children's Village in Liberia will receive 45% of the total offering. The funds provide basic needs, education, counseling, and healthcare to orphaned children. Haitian Artisans for Peace will receive 45% of the entire offering to support expectant mothers in HAPI's 'Start Right' program for maternal and newborn health in Haiti, saving lives from pregnancy test through birth. The Bishop's appeal for Michigan Disaster Response and Recovery will receive 10% of the offering.

These offerings can be made out to the Michigan Conference, noting "AC Offering" in the memo line and then mailed in the same envelope as your voting ballot.

Will there be any additional preaching or teaching?

Yes, but not during the virtual Annual Conference. Teaching sessions will be produce and available on-demand on the conference website at a later date. Watch for more information soon.

Will you be refunding registration fees?

Registrations made for the original in-person dates of the Annual Conference at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa are being fully refunded. No action is required. If you paid by credit card, you will receive a full refund within seven days. Checks were held and not cashed. Unless you need the check back, it will be voided and destroyed. If you are an equalization member or retiree, no action is required.



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Are you canceling my hotel reservations?

Hotel reservations at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa properties (Hotel, Tower, and condos) will be canceled, including those with extended dates. Those who had reservations at off-site hotels, campgrounds, and other properties need to cancel their bookings, including any direct private bookings made at Grand Traverse Resort and Spa condominiums.

Do I need to reregister for Annual Conference? When will registration open for the July virtual Annual Conference?

Yes, everyone will need to reregister. Watch for registration for the Annual Conference at the end of May 2020. Please anticipate a modest registration fee to offset the costs of a virtual Annual Conference.

Do I need to update my local church members to Annual Conference for the 2020 virtual Annual Conference?

All local church lay members to Annual Conference for 2020 should be updated in the EZRA database by May 15, 2020. These are the names invited to register as voting members of the Annual Conference.

Does voting status change with the Annual Conference in July?

Clergy

- Clergy will register with their status and appointment location as of July 1. If clergy are retiring effective July 1, they will register as retired. Their registration fee will be covered by the Commission on the Annual Conference Session.
- If local pastors are no longer appointed beginning July 1, they would not be considered clergy members of the Annual Conference.
- Those to be commissioned/ordained will have their voting status changed upon a successful vote of the clergy session. They can vote on essential legislation where appropriate.

Laity

- Lay Equalization members selected for the 2020 Annual Conference will be the seated members for the virtual Annual Conference.
- Equalization by Office members for 2020 Annual Conference will be the seated members for the virtual Annual Conference. We are extending the term of service for these members until after the July session of the virtual Annual Conference, and once the nomination report has been voted upon.
- Local churches experiencing alignment changes for the 2020-2021 year will continue with their lay member count for the 2020 Annual Conference, as this was simply a postponement of the original dates.
- If an elected local church member has transferred to another church, the congregation should elect a new person as their member. If a clergy spouse was the elected lay member to Annual Conference and have now moved to a new appointment, and have not yet transferred their membership, it is appropriate for the church Ad Council to elect a new member to represent this local church.



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Will there be a clergy session?

Yes. Online, Tuesday, July 28, from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM EDT via a secure link. The Business of the Annual Conference (BAC) will be e-mailed to registered clergy. It will be necessary to be online to vote, and clergy need to identify a location where they can participate.

Who will be present at the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination?

The Board of Ministry is working with Bishop Bard and those planning the annual conference session to develop a safe protocol for conducting this service. More details will be forthcoming.

What will happen to the pre-conference events that I registered to attend?

The Advocacy Training has become an online event on Wednesday, May 27, at 6:00 PM EDT. Visit <https://bit.ly/2SGkn7y> to register. Those who have already registered need to re-register for the online event so a link can be sent to you. We apologize for the inconvenience.

Into the deep...again – A workshop about congregational vibrancy with Dr. Candace Lewis has been canceled.

The Golf Outing has been canceled. Participants will be contacted for refunds.

The 5K Run/Walk/Ride is being re-organized into a virtual experience. Details will be coming soon.

Healthy Boundaries Training will be rescheduled through the Board of Ministry.