



Report of the Dean of the Appointive Cabinet
2020 Virtual Michigan Annual Conference
Monday, July 27, 2020
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Grace and Peace in the name of Jesus Christ! It has been my honor and pleasure to be the Dean of the Appointive Cabinet this past year. Thank you, Bishop for this opportunity! Also, thank you Appointive Cabinet for your support.

I must say, however, “what a year it has turned out to be!” As we entered our second year as the Michigan Conference, we left the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference with mixed emotions regarding the actions of the conference and the uncertainty of the next General Conference around the issues of inclusivity of the LGBTQI community. Personally, I wondered how this would affect the work of the local church and I prayed fervently that God’s peace and love would permeate the conference, so that we could focus on the work of being the Christian Church for the people in our community and out into the world.

By fall, some of the churches of the conference were laying out plans to begin their participation in the Local Church Assessment and Church Unique, while there were others who were continuing to be vital churches as they implemented ways in which to reach their community, to welcome new people into the life of the church through their learned experience with Vital Church Initiative. Our congregational excellence Director and associate directors were busy. The Local Church Assessments led some churches to begin conversations regarding how they might be able to work together on missions and ministry while others began conversations on how a merger might allow them to be healthier and more vital in their work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

As Charge Conference season ended, many churches from Northern Skies to Greater Southwest were providing food pantries and clothing stores, and churches from Mid-Michigan to Central Bay to East Winds were opening free stores, and tutoring programs for children, while Northern Waters to Heritage provided free meals, and English as a Second Language tutoring were offered, from Midwest to Greater Detroit church home repair and feeding their neighbors with community gardens. Many of these missions were shared among several congregations. Issues that divided churches theologically did not keep God’s work from happening, nor did it stop the love that God showed the world through his son Jesus the Christ. The winter was full of promise and hope and many churches were implementing or continuing their practice of vital welcome, worship and mission. While others, remembering what it means to be a connectional denomination, began working together in their communities.

As things were moving forward, we received word of a virus that was beginning to cause concern in our nation. Soon, the virus began to hit some areas of our state very

hard. It wasn't long before the church doors were closed, for the safety of all. BUT through hard work and the grace of God, the church did not close! Instead pastors, staff, laity worked together to find ways of offering daily devotions, and meaningful worship on Sunday morning. It was the church being the church working together and taking the word of God through Christ to the nation. Yes, it was a struggle at first, but with webinars provided by Conference directors, associate directors and coordinators allowing laity, clergy and staff to become more proficient with their ability to Facebook live stream, to record messages and upload to YouTube, and to provide phone conference call while teaching their members how to use these technologies. Most individuals became aware of the word Zoom. Churches set up zoom coffee hours, prayer groups, Bible study, children's ministry, youth groups and meetings for church business. It was amazing to see how creative the churches became. Laity joined their pastor and staff and began checking on their shut-ins to see if there were needs they could meet. In addition to this the laity began reaching further out into the community offering to pick up food and medication for all who could not go out. The church was the church into the world! It was exciting to hear how the churches were meeting the needs of those around them while working together to offer worship in a format that fit their community's need. For some, worries over attendance were relieved when responses to Sunday morning worship came in from the congregation and from people outside of the congregation! Members invited family, friends and neighbors to worship with them, while others connected on their own. God's message was being amplified by on-line worship! Monies were a worry and yet in many churches the members were faithful in their tithing, allowing the work of the church to strongly continue. God provided! God was faithful! Church is alive and well as each congregation determines the needs of their community to return in-person worship. The lesson was learned well, that the church can no longer close its doors on Sunday morning at the start of worship, as if all who want to be there are present. Now we know that we must continue on-line worship for those, for whatever reason, cannot be present in worship with us in the pews! We have learned and continue to learn more, but we know that God is faithful! Even when the days are dark, and the future is uncertain. God walks with us.

Then, as summer began, the news of a horrific death came across our news feed. We were able to watch video of George Floyd dying before our eyes. Through George Floyd's death we are reawakened to the racism that exists in our nation. Over the next weeks, we continued to learn of other black lives lost, while the action was being hidden by those involved. However, the news spread, and we watched and learned of many an innocent black life being senselessly ended! The nation responded. Black Lives Matter protests took place around the nation, around the state, in our communities. Congregations and pastors joined together to raise our voices to yet, another challenge for the people of God. The Christian church works to be a people of justice for all of God's people. Jesus set the example of all are welcome at God's table, regardless of their race or skin color. A wound was opened, our eyes were opened, that even though we have made progress there is still much more work to be done. The work of dismantling racism, the work of being an anti-racist white person needs to be active in the life of our churches. As the Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church,

we must continue to do our own work as well as work together and raise our voices sharing the voice of Jesus to the nation that racism is not a part of God's kingdom!

I leave you with these words shared in Acts 2:42-47: The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. ...they met together in the temple and shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone! Church this is our work! Thanks be to God!