

2021 Michigan Annual Conference

Report of Conference Leadership Council | Rev. Darryl Totty

Friday, June 4, 2021

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and Savior. God is good!

I come today celebrating the work of the Michigan Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church congregations and conference staff through the innovative work that is taking place during such a difficult time related to Covid-19.

Your prayers and support have been an essential component of our conferences' response to and recovery from COVID-19. Your patience and continued orderly work of our ministries allow us to impact the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ. I would like to thank our Conference staff, especially our program staff, who rose to the challenge of the pandemic, creating webinars, curated resources, and provided support to our local church leaders. Thank you.

Annual Conference is a particular time of purpose, joy, and reflection. It is a time to celebrate ministry milestones and achievements. I wish to thank Rev. Amy Mayo-Moyle, CLC chairperson emeritus (*Show Amy's photo in split-screen*), and Rev. Benton Heisler, *Director of Connectional Ministries*, for their work not only during 2020 but in prior years as they served the Annual Conference graciously and thoroughly.

Last Fall, the CLC received the Strategic Planning Task Force Documents and affirmed its direction. I want to share several main concepts of the plan for the future. Bishop Bard urged us not to adopt it as a Strategic Plan, but a "Strategic Direction."

In brief, the foundational document details the Missional and Connectional Challenges facing the conference.

1. Missional Challenges Include: (1) the coronavirus pandemic; (2) the current nation-wide movements confronting systemic racism; and (3) declining religious participation in the United States as the number of those claiming no religious affiliation is the fastest growing religious category in our country.
2. Connectional Challenges Include: (1) Michigan Conference's financial situation; (2) organizational models that fail to account for newer possibilities and incorporate contemporary technologies; and (3) likely possibility of denominational restructuring and split.

Growing out of these challenges are four foci.

Focus I - Sharing God's Love with Others: Renewed Passion for Personal Faith Formation & Sharing.

Focus II - Building the Beloved Community: Intentional Inclusion and the Dismantling of Systemic Racism.

Focus III - Development of Leaders: Equipped to Lead the Conference in its New Priorities.

Focus IV - Financial Sustainability: Through the Redirection of Financial Resources.

As part of this strategic work, the CLC submitted a resolution to create a District Working Group to create a plan for the possible reduction of at least one District. The CLC also formed a Strategic Staffing group, consisting of Bishop Bard, Brad Bartelmay, Paul Perez, and Ellen Zienert to restructure Conference staffing around the strategic foci.

What a promising "Strategic Direction" for the Michigan Conference.

While our denomination struggles with a future separation, I want to share why I am staying in the Michigan conference. Well, I must say because of the diversity. The United Methodist Church is not

perfect, but there is great value in connection. I believe in the church we are the body of Christ. We don't have all the answers, but we have a love that helps us transcend our differences. Unfortunately, society tends to pit us against one another where there are winners and losers. While watching the miniseries "Son of God," there was a depiction in which his disciples urged Jesus not to include the Tax Collector Matthew, but he made room at the table. In other words, to make a change, one must be at the table not pounding a fist but engaging in acts of love and humble accountability. There is much work to do, and we desire to be more inclusive so everyone feels welcome at the table. I urge you to stay; there is a place for you to exercise your spiritual gifts to bring about a more just unified conference.

Finally, in the aftermath of the May 25, 2020 killing of Mr. George Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis police officers, the Conference Leadership Council (CLC) committed itself to address systematic and personal racism.

Our time under God is now! It is a time to end the pervasive culture of racism and white supremacy by us as followers of Jesus in the Methodist tradition. 1 John 3:11-12 states, "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother."

I want to thank Bishop Bard and the Anti-Bias Anti-Racism (ABAR) workgroup for leading through action. The group calls our conference into a time of listening to each other with full hearts to be intentional about ways the Annual Conference confronts institutional racism and our racism in the community and the church.

On your behalf, CLC stands ready to provide resourcing, support, and advocacy as an expression of our commitment to anti-bias and anti-racism work as essential to our journey with Jesus. Racism is antithetical to the gospel.

We, the (Conference Leadership Council) believe Anti Bias Anti Racism work can be transformational and lead our conference into a new future whereby self-examination and repentance are daily acts in a Beloved Community.

On behalf of the entire CLC, I am glad you are here; please enjoy the balance of our time together.