

Laity Event | June 3, 2021
“More than JUST a lay person”
Keynote by Derrick Scott III

Friends in Michigan - it is so good to be with you all! I wish I could be with you in person, but I'm grateful for technology, I'm grateful for my friend Don and all the folks working behind-the-scenes up at the Michigan Annual Conference, so that we can be together in this virtual way.

My name is Derrick Scott III. I am the Director of Campus to City Wesley Foundation in Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Florida. And friends, I'm a lay person. I am a part of the ministry of the laity of The United Methodist Church, and I am so excited to be talking to the people that I feel like are, like, the Church. I mean, I love the clergy - the clergy are cool - but it's the laity, man. The laity are the folks that actually, like, do the work - not that the clergy don't do the work - but you get my point. Oh man! I'm just so excited to talk to you today, and really excited about your gathering and all that God is doing up in your part of United Methodism. And I just want to say a few words today that may hopefully inspire you and encourage you in your ministry as laity in The United Methodist Church. We need the ministry of the laity. It's not a throwaway group. It's not a default status - and I'll talk about that a little bit later - but it's actually a key part of how Jesus moves and helps people experience the love of Christ around the world through the Holy Spirit.

I want to tell you a little bit of my story. Again, my name's Derrick and I'm 40 years old now. I've been in ministry to college-aged young adults for about 18 years total - 10 years in this Wesley Foundation. But I didn't grow up United Methodist. I grew up in a Baptist Church - African American Baptist Church - and I just was used to always being in church. We were at church - on an easy week - 4 days a week, and we were the first ones to open the church and the last folks to leave. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know what it's like to be that critical to the work of the Church. And we didn't have titles like "laity" as opposed to clergy - we were just there. The part of it I did: I sang in the Choir and I was on the Youth Usher Board, I was on the Youth Finance Committee and the Sunday School Finance Committee - all these different roles that I played - and then eventually I made it to, I transitioned to, a United Methodist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. And both in the church I grew up in and in the church that I transferred to, they noticed my call, they noticed my gifts, they noticed the grace that was on my life and the way that people - particularly in The United Methodist Church - began to sort of talk to me and affirm me was to say: "Man, you should go into ministry. You should consider being an Elder." And, I appreciated it, but I never quite felt like the role really was what I was being called into. And I think many of us have experienced that where we've been doing our thing, bringing our gifts, bringing our talents to the Church - whether that be talents of leadership or talents of ministry, leading worship maybe, or even talents and gifts related to justice and mercy in the world, and people have said to us: "Man, you're so great at this, you should consider ordination." And I think it's just our shorthand way in The United Methodist Church to say that "we see what God's doing in your life", but eventually I just got this message that if I was actually going to be used in the Church, if I was gonna play a key role in the Church, that I needed to be ordained. I had this idea in my head that only the clergy were the folks who were really where the action was and, I'll tell ya', I wanted to be where the action was. I wanted to actually do something. I wanted to make my life count for the sake of Jesus in this world. And so, I'm listening to all these folks who are affirming me and cheering for me and they're like "You need to go to a candidacy retreat! You need to consider seminary!". And like, I don't know, but this is all I'm being

told, so I decided to go ahead and put my name forward as an exploring candidate here in the Florida Conference.

I remember going to that candidacy retreat and I really didn't know what I was being called into - if anything at all. You know, we have our three main opportunities - though there are lots of others - we have the three main ones: the Elder, Deacon, or Local Pastor track and I didn't really know which one I was gonna chose, which one God was calling me into, so I didn't put anything on my form. But, somehow, "Elder" got placed on my form - I guess for me. [chuckle] And so, I went to candidacy retreat and I remember, in the middle of candidacy retreat, as I'm listening to these individuals talk about their calling into vocational ministry, it was good, it was inspiring, I knew that I was really enjoying my time, but something wasn't clicking. It wasn't exactly what I felt like God was asking of me, but I didn't think there were any other options. I can say this that as I was coming through The United Methodist Church, rarely did I even hear the term "lay person" or "lay leader" or "laity" in the circles I was running in, and some of it had to do with the circles I was running in. In some United Methodist circles, we don't use all of our jargon and all of our language and all of our titles and stuff - and there's something good about that - but the only times I could remember hearing anything about laity was usually in a negative context. I rarely heard someone speak of a lay person in a way that made me say "Yeah, I think I want that.", "Yeah, I think that may be what God wants me to do.", or even "I don't know if God wants me to do that, but oh my gosh, that would be really cool, to be a lay leader."

And so, yeah, I'm in candidacy, that candidacy space - after candidacy retreat, we go into candidacy small groups here in Florida - and I'm in my candidacy small group and going through the books and listening to our times together, you know, really trying to discern what God is actually calling me to do with my life, how God would have me sort of offer my gifts to the Church. And I remember it was the fifth week of our small group, and we were discussing the options - Elder, Deacon, Local Pastor - and then I just asked my candidacy mentor - her name's Melissa Pisco, she's one of our Elders here in Florida -- I just asked Melissa, "So, tell me about the laity. That's what I'm wondering about because I've heard about this, this group, these leaders, like, tell me more about the laity." And, I'll just be honest, I don't remember anything that Melissa actually said that day, but friends, on that day, I could've sworn I heard Jesus say to me: "This is it, Derrick. This role, the laity, that's where I want you. Yeah, I want you to lead, I want you to bring all your gifts, I want you to do all that you can to advance the mission of Jesus, I want you to do all that you can to help people experience the love of Christ in the world, but I want you to do it not as a clergy person, I want you to do that as a lay person." And y'all, I'm one of those people that - partly because of the tradition I grew up in and partly because of just my unique relationship with Jesus - when I think I've heard Jesus say something to me, I can't act like I didn't hear it. [nervous chuckle] I don't know if you know what that's like? I mean, we're all working on hearing Jesus' voice. We are trying to sort of get a sense of what God's saying to us in real time, but man, in those moments where you actually think you've heard something... I don't know, for me, I just couldn't throw it away - I couldn't dismiss it. And so, I sat on it for about two weeks because, again, I didn't know of any lay people who were actually doing things that were making a difference. That's not to say that lay people weren't making a difference. I mean, our history is full of examples, our history as United Methodists - full of examples - of individuals, women and men, children of God who were rising up and living out the message of the gospel for the sake of the world and they were not ordained - tons of examples, I just didn't know any of them. But I sat on that word, I sat for a couple weeks. We had just started the campus ministry that I'm still leading now, and I felt like in some ways I was allowed to start this campus ministry 'cause I was gonna go into ordained ministry, and so I was like wondering, like: "Are they gonna make me, are they gonna make me no longer do this? Are they gonna ask me to leave my position? And

am I just gonna be kinda, you know, relegated to a back room of the church to kind of do some things every now and then, but not actually gonna really like, get my hands dirty in the mission?”. And so, I just sat on it. And y’all, I’m saying all this because I didn’t know that there was a vibrant ministry for the laity. And this is my story that I’m saying, but I wonder if some of you are with me here? I wonder if some of you are like, “Yeah, I just kinda, kinda fell into the laity. I was told that I was going to Annual Conference, and I was like, ‘Where do I go?’, and it was like, ‘The lay people go over there.’ like, ‘Okay?’” Or some of you are lay leaders, maybe in your local churches or even in your districts, [suppressed chuckle] maybe you’re the conference lay leader - I believe Annette is the conference lay leader actually. But, you know, you’re looking at these roles that you’ve been given and you’re kinda just saying, “This is what I was asked to do, but I don’t know - and this is hard to say - but I don’t know what the significance is of what it means to be a lay person in The United Methodist Church.” And I didn’t know almost ten years ago. And so, finally, I decided, “you know what, we’re just gonna have to let the chips fall where they may”, and so I sent Melissa - my candidacy mentor - I sent her an email and a couple of other folks the email that I really felt like Jesus was asking me to be a lay person, and underneath the email was this like, sort of thought, “Okay, maybe they’re gonna ask me to step away from this role.” or maybe they’re gonna say, “Hey, that’s cool, but there’s no action there, there’s no - you’re not gonna feel the significance of being a part of the big story of Jesus there.”

I just wanna let you know that a decade later that is so not what happened. On the other side of sending that email and articulating this call - this call to lay ministry - I became busier than I’d ever been. And for folks who know me, they’re like, “You got busier?” - oh yeah, I got way busy. All of a sudden, people were like, “Oh my gosh! You’re a lay person and you wanna lead and you wanna help the mission of The United Methodist Church go forward? Let’s do some stuff.” And I had the opportunity thanks to Russ Graves - who was our conference lay leader at the time - to become an associate conference lay leader, thanks to our Bishop - Bishop Ken Carter - I was allowed to do a bunch of different things here in the Conference, and the story just kind of goes on. I’ve served on several boards and became a General Conference delegate for the first time for 2016 - that was a year, that was definitely a year - and then obviously I went to 2019 - that was definitely an interesting moment in the life of our church, woah - and I’ll be going to whatever the 2020, 2021, 2022 Conference is, but, you know, I’m doing all kinds of other things and I’m using all my gifts. I’m able to really bring my gifts to the table and I’m still doing campus ministry! I have these colleagues who are ordained Elders and Licensed Local Pastors, people who have M.Divs and people who have PhDs and Doctorates that I’m working alongside - I have a Bachelor of Arts in History - but somehow our church has been able to make room for a lay person like me, not just to kinda pick up a couple assignments here and there, but to really feel like - and I mean this y’all - I feel like I’m living my best life. But part of the reason I know I’m living my best life is because I’m truly able to live into my call as a lay person - a leader in the Church. Friends, that’s what I’m called to. There may be a day down the line that Jesus sort of changes the narrative, flips the script, and says “Hey Derrick, maybe you should consider ordained ministry now”, but I am super confident that for this season of my life I have been called not to the ministry of clergy, but to be a lay person in The United Methodist Church. That is my story, and so, my question for you now is: what’s your story?

All of you folks who are in this Zoom room, who you were asked to be here in the lay session, in the laity session - you were asked to come. Maybe you are, like I said, the lay leader of your congregation and maybe you’re - you didn’t know you were the lay leader until your pastor said, “Hey, I need you to go to the laity session.” like, “uh, okay, cool”. Maybe you’re the district lay leader or maybe you’re the conference lay leader - serving in different roles in different capacities within the conference in Michigan... But I wonder what your story is? And I hope that your story is not simply, “Well, there was this role, they asked me to fill it, and I’m doing it.” But I hope that there is some moment that you had

where you heard the Spirit of Jesus say directly to you, "I want you to serve our church and I want you to be a part of my mission by being a part of the laity."

Um, I know everybody's got their Book of Discipline with them right now because why wouldn't you, right? Why wouldn't you have a Book of Discipline with you? But I happen to have my 2016 version here, and I just wanna read to you this one paragraph from The Book of Discipline about the ministry of the laity. It's paragraph 127, and I want you to hear this, okay? I love what this says because while, yes, it's The Book of Discipline and there's kind of a words on paper kind of a book that we use kind of as a rule book, but actually I think there's some life-giving and direction-giving words in this paragraph for us as lay leaders and lay, lay folk in the Church. Listen to these words, friends: "The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling" - I don't care where you are right now, but I want all of you to say "calling", and I definitely can't hear you because I'm in Lakeland and you're up in Michigan, if you could just say "calling" for me one more time, everybody say, "calling." Yes - "by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission ([based on] Matthew 28:18 - 20); every layperson is called to be missional. The witness of the laity, their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ and The United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission."

Okay, friends: that paragraph is not a default status... This paragraph here in The Book of Discipline related to the laity, it is not simply a "Well, there was a position and I think you might wanna, you might have some time if you're retired" or "You're a young person, what do you got time to do? You can maybe do"- no, no, no. These are not, like, dismissive roles. The end of it says this is literally how "The United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission" - it "is the primary evangelistic ministry" of our church. And so, again I ask all of the lay folk in the room, in the Zoom room: what's your story? How'd you get to be in a room full of lay leaders?

It's important my friends, it's important that you know that to be a lay person in The United Methodist Church - while yes, we are the majority of the Church - it is, like I have said, it is not a default status. Yes, there are folks in our church who are called to ordained and licensed ministry, folks who are called to local pastoring, and called to Deacon's orders, called to be Elders in the Church - definitely. And we create incredible spaces for that call to be named and nurtured - definitely - and celebrated. But let us not forget, the reason why we have those individuals - this is based on Ephesians 4, you can check it out later - the reason why we have those individuals is so that the rest of us could receive our calling, could have our gifts named and nurtured, could have our talents celebrated, and to be told "Hey, you are not just a" - let me use some campus ministry language for a minute here, forgive me - "you are not just a butt in a seat on a Sunday, but you are called to be 'the primary evangelistic ministry' by which The United Methodist Church fulfills its mission."

Friends, you are not laity by default, you are actually the gospel on the ground. You are the ones who can go to places that our clergy sometimes can't get to. Friends, a lot of our clergy cannot find themselves in a classroom on Tuesdays at 10am because they've not been called to hang out with six-year-olds. Now, some of you out there, the Holy Spirit has woken you up in the middle of the night and has said, "I need you to hang out with the teenagers on a regular basis. I need you to teach them algebra, and I need you to teach them algebra in a way that they get that - not simply so that they know algebra - but so they get that they have minds that have been given to them by a creative God that calls them to use all of who they are for the sake of the world." Some of you have been called to being an accountant and I just wanna give a handclap to all the accountants out there because that is a beautiful

calling and if Jesus ever tells me that he doesn't want me to do ministry anymore, I'm going for my accounting degree 'cause I so, so love it. But there are folks, yes, you've been gifted and yes, called - not just because you've got the degree - but you have been called to be an accountant. Some of you have been called to politics and to government and to public service, some of you have been called to food service, some of you have been called, yeah, to make craft beer and to serve that to people. That's a whole other conversation that we can talk about on another day, craft beer, 'cause I do - pause. I actually, as a part-time gig, I pour craft beer. I work at a brewery in Jacksonville, Florida. I've been doing it for seven years - love it, love it, love it - it's a whole different part of my ministry and, again, we can talk about that later, but it's a calling, man, and it's a beautiful one. Okay - unpause. I do that with my college students when I'm going off on a tangent, I'll have them all say "pause", I'll do my tangent real quick, and I'll have them say "unpause", and then they chuckle 'cause like, there's no "unpause" it's really "play" - okay, you get, or maybe you don't get it, but I'll just keep going - ha-ha!

Every single person in the room is called and the gift of the laity to The United Methodist Church is that you are called to be the gospel on the ground. You are the ones that get to be in the boardroom on Wednesday at 3pm. Some of you will be the ones who will be sitting and moving between hospital rooms on Friday at noon. And while, yes, we will see clergy popping up in different spaces and often clergy are waiting for us in the four walls of the church, but friends, the work of the laity is what actually makes the work of the clergy possible. Friends, if we are not living out our evangelistic call to be the gospel on the ground for the sake of the world, to be the hands and feet and heart and life of Jesus, then how will people ever, on a regular basis, know that there's a God in Heaven that loves them?

You know, we just had some news come out in the last couple of weeks, and that news is that a poll was taken - 47% of Americans estimated now have church affiliation, which means that the majority of US citizens are not affiliated with a faith community. And you know what that signal [snaps] should be for us? Not simply, "Aw, man, what's happened to our churches?" and "Why aren't our churches attracting people?" and "What's going on with our clergy?", but that actually should be a wake-up call to the laity: what are we doing? I mean, when we look at the state of our church, when we look at all of the empty seats on Sunday morning, when we look at the fact that the Church has lost influence in culture - yes, there is definitely a conversation about our institutional leadership, there's definitely a conversation about the way our churches are run, but there's a big conversation about who we are Monday through Saturday. When we, the laity, are not doing our part, playing our role, and taking on our call the Church is not who it needs to be in the world.

And so, I hope I'm disturbing some of you today - we have to have a new revelation of what it means to be a lay person in The United Methodist Church. Regardless of what happens for our denomination going forward, we have got to wrestle for a new understanding of our calling, a fresh understanding of our calling... and that's what I'm here to do today. I'm here to invite you to consider how you might be, yeah, the ministry of the laity for the sake of The United Methodist Church and the experienced love of Jesus in the world.

And so, what I'd like to do in the rest of time is I'd like to go directly to Scripture because I love how the Text always has a way of pulling us back to center, giving us an opportunity to hear Jesus' voice again, and allowing us to figure out what it means for us in our everyday life.

And the passage that I want to read for you, friends, I want to say that while this is a passage that I think is for the laity, it's for the clergy too. So, if there are any clergy who are listening, I'm not gonna center your voice right now, but you can get something out of this too, but this message really is for the laity of the Church.

I want to read to you from Matthew chapter 9, and I'm reading from the Common English Bible. Listen to these words and, again, I want you to hear these words as a lay person, as someone - not someone who's living their life in the four walls of the Church - but someone who's job literally is to be where the people are. Listen to this! Starting in verse 35: "Jesus traveled among all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest." Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, I just need you to know that we started at verse 35, but if you read the whole chapter of Matthew, you're gonna find that over and over again Jesus is doing this work of healing and restoring and coming alongside people - he's where the people are and he's always getting stopped to ask a question or deal with some controversy, but ultimately, Jesus is just where the people are and he's looking for some folks who will come with him on that journey, looking for some folks who will join him in simply being where the people are. And again, this is where I want to speak directly to the laity, it's the privilege that we have as lay folk - that we get to be where the people are and, not that the clergy don't get to, but, man, we totally get to. We get to work with people, come alongside, acting like as, as peers, right? Like, we're not walking in with collars and we're not walking in with credentials, we're walking in - we're just living out our walk with Jesus, trying to figure out how we're gonna make sense of our lives. We are just like our friends, just like our neighbors, just like the people in our community, and we're just where people are.

And the first thing that I want you to consider as we consider the work of the laity - that's what we want to talk about right now - as we consider the work of the laity, I wonder if maybe the best thing that we can talk about at the beginning is simply being where the people are. So, here's the deal, if 47% of the US population is now affiliated with the Church then that means that the majority of the US population is outside the walls of the Church. What is our job as "the primary evangelistic ministry" of The United Methodist Church? To be where that 53% is. [pause] To be present and to be active and to consider how we might take up space - good, graceful space; good, winsome space - by how we might engage the world as peers and neighbors and everyday folks... we want to be where the people are. But here's what we discover when we are where the people are - and it's what Jesus discovered. We discover 1. That they are - the way an older translation says - they are harassed and helpless. And I say two things in that. They are harassed - there's something happening, they are oppressed, there's a reason why they are struggling, there's a reason why things are not great, and we know that we live in a broken world. But sometimes we Christians will say, "man, we live a broken world, but I guess I'll just go back to my couch and watch my Netflix." Friends, we are the laity. [claps for emphasis] We have been called to be where the people are and when we see that people are harassed, we not only have any obligation to act and to be advocates and to be ministers of justice in the world, but it's our privilege to do that in the way that often the clergy can't do. Have you ever looked across your regions in Michigan... who are the harassed? Who are the folks that are oppressed - the "troubled" as the Common English Bible says? And we can be the folks that are like, "Hey Pastor! Watcha gonna do?" But actually, I think the Holy Spirit's looking for a few workers out there who are like, "Oh my gosh! There are harassed, oppressed, troubled people and I may be able to use my gifts, I may be able to use my degrees, I may be able to use my means to bring some - to help them, to actually alleviate suffering, to be a conduit of the justice of Heaven for the sake of the people around me... as a lay person, as a leader of the laity." And then here's what we get to do, we then get to go back to our clergy and to say, "I know that your heart is for justice, but here's what I'm experiencing on the ground. You've been in the four walls of the Church. You've been studying the scriptures and digging into theology that really helps us as the Church really live into our call to be

justice-seekers, but I'm doing the work on the ground and here's what I'm seeing and here's what it would be great if you could talk about, Pastor." We get to be the folks who come alongside the harassed. It doesn't just say "harassed", right? It says also "the helpless" - those who literally need help, those who need someone to be there to come alongside in some profound and significant ways. And friends, again, we've not been called to simply do Sunday morning church and that's it. Somehow, we laity have got to get back to where the people are and to bring the gifts. This is where the resources of the Church become so important, and we get to be the folks who can speak up and say: "We have this building. We have these means. We have these people. We have this opportunity."

We as a church have this voice and we can speak to our government officials, and we can go not as clergy - though clergy are awesome - but as everyday citizens and say, "Hey, I'm a lay person in The United Methodist Church and I live amongst people who are helpless and I feel like we need to do something - not just talk about it - but do something so that we can bring equity to the world - we can bring healing and ministries of mercy to the world." So, I wonder, yes, how many of our laity are called to ministries of justice right in the spaces that you're in? Ministries of justice, yes, in the classroom. Ministries of justice in the courtroom. But I also wonder how many are called to ministries of mercy? Ministries of mercy, when you're in construction - that would be an interesting space to consider how mercy might look like. Ministry of mercy when you're actually like, helping companies figure out how they're going to do their finances and how they're going to spend their money - ministries of mercy. And I've got one more for you, for the laity here - justice, mercy, and I want to invite us to think that the work of the laity is around leadership.

Leadership 'cause one other thing that the Scripture says, "they're like sheep without a shepherd" ... If there was ever a moment that we needed everyday leadership in our world, it's today. And yes, we need leadership in the Church, but we need leadership in the world. We need leadership in our governments, we need leadership in our schools, we need leadership in nonprofit sectors, we need leadership in the military, and friends - that's us. [pause] That's our privilege. I don't know if you've ever thought about the place where you work or the place where you live as a place of ministry for you, but if the clergy are coming from the pulpit maybe many of us are coming from our laptops - particularly in the age of COVID. Many of us are coming from our desks amongst our co-workers. Many of us are coming from behind the cash register. Many of us are being called to bring ministries of justice and mercy and leadership because we have been called, because we are the gospel on the ground, we have been called to bring those ministries right where we are - in our neighborhoods and in our jobs and in our community spaces.

This is what I see in this text. I see in this text, the work of the laity. And again, our work, I think, is multifaceted, but I would want to say that our work is definitely work of justice, work of mercy, and work of leadership. And so, I want to continue - I want to read it again - just a little bit more of this text and then I'll be done. Starting in verse 37, Jesus says to his disciples, "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers." and friends, I just gotta say, the workers are not just the clergy - it's us! It's the laity. It's all of us in this room. It's those of us who are in our twenties and we're still trying to figure out what God wants to do with our lives and what we're gonna do with this degree that we got, or what are we gonna do with all this time that we have now that we're not in school, and we don't hear Jesus saying, "Go down that road of ordination." but we do hear Jesus saying, "Come - work with me, follow me, be an example of my love and be a conduit of my grace in the world." We are the workers. Those of us who are in our forties, like me, who've lived some life and we've got some life ahead of us and we've got some decisions to make about what the rest of our life looks like and, man, we could totally begin to think about the rest of our life as a cruise, or we could think about the rest of our life as being the laity of the Church, of being the folks who live out the gospel on the

ground for the sake of those who don't know Jesus yet. And some of us, we are in our seventies and eighties, and you're just thinking, "I've done my time, I've been to all the meetings and, you know, Derrick, I've been a lay leader for this many years and I've gone to this many Annual Conferences and I just think it's time for me to just, you know, take a step back." And I do want us to make room for the next generation, but I do wanna remind you that, uh, Moses definitely got his calling - was really living into his calling - at the age of 80. And for those of us who take the Text seriously, I hope you'll take that part seriously too. That just because you're 80 doesn't mean that the calling has gone away. And the question is, how can those of us who are in the later years, in the senior years, the more experienced years of life be the hands and feet, the heart and life of Jesus for the sake of the world? Friends, this is call of the laity - this is the ministry of the laity - and friends, the world is waiting on us. That's our work.

And so, I'm gonna continue and I'm gonna go right into chapter 10. Hear these words in chapter 10, chapter 10 of Matthew: "So Jesus called his disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to throw them out and to heal every disease and every sickness. Now here are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John his brother; Philip; and Bartholomew; and Thomas; and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; and Thaddaeus; and Simon the Cananaean; and" - now, I'm gonna give you Derrick Revised Standard Version here - "and Judas, who betrayed Jesus. And Don, who's helping me with this video today; and Laura who's been working in the conference office; and Annette; and Mark; and Erin; and Kristin; and Jonathan; and Martha" - and I could just go on and on. And my question as I'm ending today, friends, is: can you hear Jesus calling your name in the list of disciples who are going to be those workers who are going to live out these ministries of justice, mercy, and leadership for the sake of the world, not from a position of clergy orders, but from a position of being where the people are? Are you willing for your name to be called in that list? Are you willing for your name to be added to the list of those that Jesus can look to when there's an issue that needs to be dealt with, when there are people who are harassed and oppressed in your communities? Are there any individuals who will put their hand up and say, "Jesus, I'm a lay person, but I'm not just a lay person. I'm a lay person with gifts that can be used to bring justice and advocacy in this situation."? When there's a moment in the state of Michigan that there are people who are helpless, can the Holy Spirit look around the Michigan Annual Conference and ask the question, "Are there any lay people who are willing to get their hands dirty and to be where their people are? To bring solution to these problems?" And I hope that there's someone in the Michigan Annual Conference, some lay person that says, "I'm not just a lay person. I'm the gospel on the ground. I've been called to this moment to bring help and solution." And I do hope - oh man - when there's a need for leadership, yes, in the Church, and in the world, that some lay person in the Michigan Annual conference would say: "I'm not just a lay person. I am not a lay person by default. I am the hands and feet, heart and life of Jesus for the sake of the world. And so, yes, I will put my hand up for Jesus to use me in whatever way he wants to."

Friends, I hope that I've done my job today of just really wanting to encourage you, inspire you, compel you, and challenge you to discern your call, to tell your story, and to be "the primary evangelistic ministry" by which The United Methodist Church fulfills its mission. Friends, you - the laity - you are, man, you are the gospel on the ground. You are the hands and feet, heart and life of Jesus that is able to go into places that the clergy cannot go.

My favorite scripture in all the New Testament is Romans 8:19, and it says this: "The whole world waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." And here's what I know, I know that right now there are people in Michigan and throughout the world that are waiting for the lay folk in the Michigan Annual Conference to take their place. There are neighborhoods in Michigan that are waiting on the edge of their seats - waiting with anticipation - for the lay folk in Michigan to rise up and say, "We

are not just lay people. We are not laity by default, but we have a calling to justice and mercy and leadership and so much more, and we are ready to be the people that God is asking us to be.”

I know for certain that right now the world is waiting for some children of the Most High God, right there in Michigan, to say, “I will put my hand up to be hands and feet, heart and life - to be where the people are, so that they would experience the love of Christ.”

So, friends, that’s my prayer for you. That’s my prayer: that you would discover your story, your calling as a lay person - you wouldn’t think it’s a dismissive role, you wouldn’t think it’s a default setting, but you would see it as a gift and a privilege to be the folks who get to walk out the walls of the Church and to be the expression of the Living King, the expression of the Living Jesus, for the sake of the world.

And so, with that, I pray blessings on you, and I give God praise for all that God is doing in the midst of the lay folk in the Michigan Annual Conference. Thanks for letting me share with you all!