

2022 Michigan Annual Conference Delegation Report

Thursday, June 2, 2022

From Mourning to Dancing:

Resilience in a Time of Pandemic and Uncertainty

Kennetha Bigham-Tsai:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and you the Michigan Annual Conference, created a delegation. These good people behind me have to be the longest-serving delegation in the history of the church.

I imagine that their experience has been a little like the movie, “Ground Hog’s Day.” You all remember that movie? It was a 1993 comedy starring Bill Murray. Murray plays a weatherman, Phil Connors, who has to cover the Ground Hog’s Day festival in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. When Phil gets there, he discovers that this is the assignment that never ends. To his chagrin, he wakes up every morning to Sonny and Cher singing, “*I Got You, Babe*,” and then repeats that same day over again.

So, friends of the Michigan Annual Conference, these are your delegates, elected in 2019 for the 2020 General Conference. They have survived the postponement of the General Conference three times. They have made it through a pandemic in appropriately socially distanced ways. They have met to discuss legislation that is only a dream and read a good part of the 1065-page ADCA, despite the fact that some of it is now destined to become someone’s substitute for kitty litter.

Delegation members, please stand up and allow Laura and I and the annual conference to thank you.

DELEGATION MEMBERS STAND

Laura Witkowski:

After giving our report at last year’s annual conference we were unclear about what would come next for our delegation. Sure, we had dates reserved on our calendars but that had always been the case. In July 2021 the North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops called a special session of the North Central Jurisdiction. Initially, the plan was for it to be in person and was eventually changed to a Zoom conference due to the rise of the Delta variant of COVID-19 at that time. As delegates, we looked forward to being able to fulfill part of our responsibility.

Delegates of the North Central Jurisdiction met through Zoom November 10-11 with approximately 250 delegates from 10 conferences participating. The focus was on 3 major

topics, dismantling racism, the future of episcopal leadership in the jurisdiction, and the future of The United Methodist Church.

Throughout the two days, we heard powerful stories of truthtellers who shared their personal experiences with racism. Presentations were also made regarding episcopal leadership and the future of The UMC. We met in small groups to connect with others from across the jurisdiction to deeply consider these important topics together. As the groups met our opinions, answers and thoughts were submitted through forms that eventually led to the Covenant to Build BeLoved Community.

Several items came out of those two days online together. You can see the three items we affirmed in the Michigan Annual Conference Resolution #2022-9 on page 9 of our Voting Items book, Affirming Actions for the Future of The United Methodist Church. The North Central Jurisdiction adopted the Covenant to Build BeLoved Community, the document titled A Call to Grace written earlier that year, and A Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church from the Council of Bishops.

Finally, the delegates affirmed the recommendation from the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy for one episcopal election at the next jurisdictional conference. This means we would go from our current nine episcopal areas to eight. The Judicial Council also has recently ruled that Jurisdictional Conferences can take place in 2022 for the purpose of electing bishops. And the Council of Bishops has affirmed the dates for jurisdictional conferences, November 2-5, 2022. The North Central Jurisdictional Conference will be held in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

KBT:

Friends, the events of these past years have shown us that resilience is the word of the moment. We have dealt with a pandemic, which disrupted our lives, closed our churches for a time, made some of us sick, and even took the lives of some of our loved ones.

In the past weeks, we have seen tornadoes devastate Gaylord, a community not far from here; we have witnessed the massacre in Buffalo, New York, an instance of horrific racial violence, that was followed ten days later by the killing of babies in Uvalde, Texas. And let us not forget the ongoing suffering of the people of Ukraine.

If anything, the need for resilience, in this time of uncertainty and mourning, is the need of the moment. But our resilience is based in our knowledge of who we are and whose we are. We are children of a God who is faithful and has promised to turn our mourning into dancing and clothe us with joy (Psalm 30:11). We are United Methodists--a connectional people grounded in

the hope we find Scripture and energized by a Wesleyan theology of grace. We find resilience by claiming our identity as United Methodists, a people of God open to the movement of the Holy Spirit which perfects us in love.

One of the things that we have been reflecting on during these in-between times—is the question of our identity. What does it mean to be United Methodist? Laura is going to share why she has chosen to BeUMC. As you hear these words, perhaps you will find some touchstones for yourselves.

LW:

Whenever I think about why I'm a United Methodist I often think of one story. As an adult, while I was working as a local church administrative assistant, I received an email from a former youth leader. He said something like, "I don't know if you remember, but I spent a few months helping lead the youth group at your church a long time ago. The thing I remember most was at youth group one night during a difficult faith-related topic most of the kids were being quiet and shy. You, on the other hand, weren't afraid to speak up and ask thoughtful questions, even though it was hard. I just wanted you to know that I really appreciated that."

The email caught me off guard and honestly, I didn't remember that one night, maybe that's because it happened a lot. I don't know. But it did get me thinking that I was so grateful to be part of a church where I could ask questions. A place that gave me and gives me the space and grace to ask. I've been a United Methodist my whole life and I continue to be grateful that my son is also part of that same church where he can speak up and ask big thoughtful questions about Jesus and God, as he grows in his faith too.

KBT:

Friends as we end, we want to thank you for allowing us to serve the Michigan Annual Conference as your delegation. We serve because we are committed to this annual conference and to The United Methodist Church—a church that encourages us to ask questions and to be open to God, to each other, and the world.

LW:

We serve because God has called us to work and pray to make this church the best version of itself—a church that makes disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and welcomes all people who wish to experience a loving God revealed in Jesus Christ. Thank you so much for allowing us to serve.