

Michigan Annual Conference Leadership Development Project

Friday, June 3, 2022

Good afternoon, friends! I'm Laura Witkowski, a layperson and conference staff where my focus is on lay leadership development.

I know it's the afternoon and this is often the most difficult part of our day during annual conference, we've had lunch, we're a little tired, and we're on day 2 (for some, day 3). But I'd like to start this leadership development update with a simple meditation. Maybe this will energize you in a surprising way?

You're invited to adjust yourself into a prayer practice position, as best you can. Maybe put both feet on the ground and relax your shoulders. Maybe put your hands face up on your lap. Or maybe put one hand on your heart. And just be still. I will say a series of phrases, pausing for about 3 seconds between each one, and you're invited to simply take in each phrase. There may be one phrase that particularly speaks to you. You are invited to receive it. Be still.

I am made in God's image. I am not God (8). I am not avoidant (9). I am not the judge (1). I reflect love (2). I am not a persona (3). Nothing is ordinary (4). I can show up (5). I am courageous (6). God fills me (7). I am made in God's image. Amen.

Throughout the past two years, the Michigan Conference has been clarifying its resourcing strategies. You may remember hearing during the online Annual Conference last year about our strategic foci centering around sharing the love of God, building the beloved community, developing leaders, and financial sustainability. In August 2021, Rev. Paul Perez, Rev. Dirk Elliott, and I began working with the consulting group Ministry Incubators to design and develop a strategy across the conference around the focus of developing leaders.

There was interest in using a human-centered, design-thinking, incubation approach for launching this conference-wide focus. This approach pushed us toward curiosity, committed us to a bias toward action, helped us reframe problems, encouraged radical collaboration, and challenged us to intentionally use incubation in developing this strategy. We, as a conference, need to develop habits of innovators. In our rapidly changing world, we need an innovative mindset. After all, we do have The Henry Ford Museum of Innovation in our state!

In order to ensure that lay and clergy leaders across the Michigan Conference were able to contribute to this leadership development focus, that they will eventually use, we began with the first step of being empathetic through listening sessions. In October 2021, Ministry Incubators conducted a series of listening sessions on Zoom to hear about the needs, frustrations, and dreams of lay and clergy leaders in Michigan. We're grateful to all of those who participated, and we learned a lot!

We heard you say that ‘yes, it is an asset that there are lots of resources available,’ and that ‘yes, it is a challenge that there are lots of resources available.’ We heard a need for more targeted offerings and not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. We heard a need to have components that enhance faith formation and relational connection. The hoped-for outcomes shared included things like consistent rhythm and communication; relationship building and faith formation components, not just content, in all offerings; paying attention to transitional moments in the life of the church; and soul care and faith formation for ministry leaders.

Following this uncovering of needs, a group of 16 conference ministry leaders met for two days to begin naming the current landscape of leadership development in the conference. The end result was the beginning of a roadmap for thinking critically, faithfully, and practically about developing leaders in this next season of the conference’s life. The group named that deliberate attention needed to be given to defining leadership development, inventorying, evaluating, communicating, and creating relationship-building protocols.

I am Rev. Dr. Anthony Hood. I serve as the pastor at First United Methodist Church in Farmington and am the chairperson of the Board of Congregational Life. I also participated in the initial Design Sprint.

An important piece that came out of the two-day gathering was the Design Sprint Story. In it, we named the problem. While we are proud that our conference staff and ministry leaders did not become paralyzed at the beginning of the pandemic, it did result in an extraordinary number of resources. There was no clear integrated strategy which made the resources a disjointed collection of endless possibilities.

In this refreshed commitment to developing leaders within the beloved community, the Michigan Conference will strive to structure all offerings around accessibility, innovation, and relational connections. This work will equip and empower leaders in ways that bring joy and confidence to the ongoing work of the Spirit.

One of those equipping and empowering offerings is the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy. It is a program created to center Latinx youth and encourage them on their educational and career journeys. The Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy has been held in Michigan for seven years and we are now seeing the impact. In 2019, two young persons graduated from the academy and one of them was valedictorian of her high school. This year another participant graduated from college as a first-generation college student. In the future, the leadership team is excited to partner with Wesley foundations and Campus ministries to provide this important program.

In January and March 2022, two more groups met every day for 10 days for two Scrum Sprints. What’s a scrum sprint you ask? We did too. A scrum sprint is a time-boxed event focused on a specific goal or larger task that is broken down into smaller tasks. The goal is typically an increment or iteration, not a perfected final product. It is meant to keep the project moving forward, to make the best possible progress towards the goal. In each sprint, a group of 8-10

conference ministry leaders met in a concentrated effort to begin developing protocols and action steps.

The design steps of empathizing, uncovering, defining, and designing, led to where we are now, implementing. We will begin to test our design and protocols by looking at how the offerings address our leadership development definition and competencies, how relationship building is embedded into everything, how promotion, marketing and evaluation are consistent and then making changes as needed. Five of our conference offerings will pilot the design.

I am Gerry Conti, a layperson from First United Methodist Church in Ypsilanti, and a participant in the initial Design Sprint. I am also a coach, one of many in this conference. Two of the ways we serve are to partner with laypersons and pastors in the Seed to Harvest program, as well as with pastors during an appointment transition and laypersons during a leadership transition. Coaches provide confidential support, clarification, and challenge to help you discover and nurture your own already-present seeds of knowledge and excellence. Coaching in the Michigan Conference helps you to be your very best, as God wants you to be.

Coaching is one of the five in the pilot program. Another you just heard about, is the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy. A third in the pilot program is our variety of Cohorts. Cohorts could be anything from a Children's Ministry Leader Cohort to Mission Intern Cohorts, long-term or short-term cohorts on any topic. A fourth is the Enneagram Journey. The Enneagram Journey course is a leadership tool that will help you lead from who you are, understand the motivations of others, and see how we are all coming from different perspectives. The fifth is Seed to Harvest and you will hear about that in just a second. As you participate in one of these five you will be part of testing our process.

We are grateful for the support from Ministry Incubators throughout this process and we hope that you will join in the implementation of this strategy by participating in one of these pilot programs.

The Michigan Conference prioritizes developing ministry leaders through building relationships and deepening competencies and well-being. The purpose of our leadership development is to strengthen current gifts and talents and learn new skills for leading where God calls us, in diverse contexts, communities, and ministries.

Here's a look at the ministry of Seed to Harvest. [Video plays]