General Conference 2016
Deals with Important Issues

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SOON DELEGATES FROM WISCONSIN WILL JOIN HUNDREDS OF UNITED METHODISTS from around the world in Portland, Oregon for the 2016 General Conference, which takes place May 10-20. The General Conference, the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, meets once every four years to revise Church law and adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public and economic issues. Our delegates have been meeting regularly for the past two years in preparation for their important task. Here are some thoughts they recently shared:

Rev. Steve Zekoff – Clergy Delegate and Chair

“I look forward to the family reunion aspect; it’s great to see people who are there from around the world. We are becoming increasingly an international denomination; almost 45% of delegates attending will be from outside the U.S. It’s always a challenge to figure out how we are going to get through all of this legislative material in a short period of time, and handle it effectively, and somehow we do it.”
Gail Burgess – Lay Delegate
“I am glad to be able to vote and be part of what’s happening in The United Methodist Church. This is a pretty critical Conference … we realize that we are global, and getting more and more global. One of the big things for the U.S. is learning how to be a partner and collaborator with all of the other countries.”

Rev. Sam Royappa – Clergy Delegate
“I am excited to experience the worship and fellowship, and the global connection for the glory of God. General Conference is like a rainbow--multicolored, multigenerational, multiracial, and multinational. The General Conference is focusing on health, growth and vitality and that’s what Wisconsin is all about.”

Rev. Dan Dick – Clergy Delegate
“The United Methodist Church as an institution is far from perfect, but as a body of believers, it has the power to change the world. General Conference has the potential for some amazing synergy – together we are greater than the sum of our parts. Deeply committed and spiritual men and women of all ages, races, nations, and worldviews gather to pool their hearts for God and their love of God’s Church to work together to make our denomination as faithful, as effective, and as successful as possible. It is overwhelmingly inspirational to get to know the stories of our delegates as they come together to honor and glorify God through ten days of hard, fruitful work. I love it!”

Rev. Amanda Stein – Reserve Clergy Delegate
“I love General Conference because for me who comes from a small family, I love going to a place where thousands are gathered and they all feel like family. There are connections that we have as United Methodists through our traditions and values that we all have in common. It’s a lot of fun; you get to see folks you haven’t seen, and enjoy and love, like a reunion.”

Barbara Dick – Lay Delegate
“I am humbled to represent the broad diversity of Wisconsin. And I know that our delegation is not deeply diverse, but we have been reaching out to all constituents through listening sessions. We are doing our very best to hear the concerns and desires of all groups, so all of that can be part of what we do as we move into the process of voting.”

Tom Popp – Lay Reserve Delegate
“General Conference is about bridges; it’s a chance to connect with United Methodists from around the world who have different viewpoints, passions, skills, gifts and graces. I’d love to find out how we can connect with each other, even if we don’t always agree. I know it’s our job to take care of the institution, but I hope that we remember to be the Church … to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the prisoners, and do what Jesus taught us to do.”

Katie Estrem-Fuller Crise is also a General Conference delegate. Additional jurisdictional (NCJ) delegates are Lisa King (lay), Judy Vasby (lay), Jorge Mayorga Solis (clergy) and Dan Schwerin (clergy). The other NCJ lay reserves are Jennifer Southworth, Diane Odeen, John Lawson and Julie Schubring. NCJ Clergy reserves are Dawn Helton Anishinaabeqwa, Jeremy Deaner, George Kafer and Jenny Arneson.
JOIN US JUNE 10-13 AT THE MADISON MARRIOTT WEST AS WE REAP THE BOUNTIFUL HARVEST OF THE LAST FOUR YEARS. Your presence and gifts will add to our connections in ministry as we gather together in holy conferencing. We will enjoy music from Rich Rubietta, adopt a budget and discuss important Conference matters, honor renewed covenant relationships with Health and Welfare Ministries, celebrate new church starts and graduates of our new Institute of Congregational Development program, and take home new ideas and strategies from Learning Day workshops. Visit www.tinyurl.com/wiac2016. Here are some other planned highlights:

Welcoming Special Guests
An Oneida Drum Circle will open our time together by sanctifying the Plenary and Worship Areas, followed by opening worship led by Bishop Jung. Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary President Dr. Lallene Rector and General Board of Global Ministries’ In Mission Together Patrick Friday will also join us.

Growing Through Bible Study
Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC), will lead us in a Bible Study on Saturday and Sunday. As President and General Secretary
of NCC, he speaks for the Council; works with staff, board members, and Christian and interfaith leaders; and is responsible for providing leadership and management of daily affairs and operations.

**Honoring Class of 2016 Retirees**

Bishop Sharon Rader, who served as our Bishop from 1992-1996, will preach during a worship service honoring our 16 clergy retiring this year. A booklet with biographical information and stories from retirees will be handed out at this service.

**Walking the Trail of Repentance Through Worship**

In 2012, each Annual Conference was asked to take a journey towards repentance for the past treatment of Native Americans, who were tortured and killed by many. On Sunday morning, Chebon Kernell, Executive Secretary for Native American and Indigenous Ministries for the General Board of Global Ministries, will lead us in a powerful Walking the Trail of Repentance Worship Service. At this service, we will welcome Native Americans from three tribes, enjoy music from Oneida singers, and take an offering to support United Methodist Native American Ministries.

**Celebrating Ordination, Licensing, and Commissioning**

Bishop Young Jin Cho, Episcopal leader of the Virginia Conference, will help us celebrate those being licensed, commissioned, and ordained. At this year’s service, we will welcome clergy from the Korean Methodist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, celebrate the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Deacon in Full Connection, and hear music from Rich Rubietta and a Conference choir led by Neil Bubke of Whitefish Bay UMC. An offering will also be taken for the Clergy in Transition Fund.

**Commemorating Bishop Jung's Episcopal Leadership and Imagine No Malaria**

Bishop Jung has been our Episcopal leader for four years, and we will take time to thank him for his passion, compassion, and guidance! We will celebrate his visits to all of our churches and circuits, his leadership as Chair of UMCOR, and his vision to Imagine Wisconsin Anew. And, we will rejoice for the lives we have saved on our journey to raise $1 million for Imagine No Malaria over the last two years.

**Imagine Wisconsin Anew**

All of this is part of our focus to Imagine Wisconsin Anew with ongoing efforts to transform our congregations into vital centers of spiritual growth, sow the seeds of new faith communities, develop relationships with new and diverse people, and engage communities and people with life giving opportunities.
Learner-Leader Academy Plans to Revitalize Congregations

Sponsored by the Discipleship Leadership Executive Team (DLET), the Wisconsin Conference Learner Leader Academy (LLA) was launched in January to revitalize congregations. Our local church turnaround movement is part of our Conference vision to Imagine Wisconsin Anew.

According to Rev. Sam Royappa, one of the academy leaders, “the purpose of the LLA is to systematically equip and constantly resource clergy and laity in spiritual formation, leadership development, worship, witness, outreach and service. Disciples are more like the Sea of Galilee than the Dead Sea. They are healthy and grow because water flows in and flows out. Disciples grow because they give to and invest in others for Jesus and His Church and the community.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

It is hoped that LLA will resource, challenge, and strengthen local congregations, as well as motivate them to multiply various ministries in each church, circuit and community.


Those who register will participate in a total of six learning sessions throughout the year. Participants are expected to bring what they have learned back to their congregations to multiply the ministries in which their church is involved. LLA seeks to re-energize each church, lay and clergy, through effective resourcing where lay and clergy recover the Jesus method to train disciples to make more disciples for the transformation of the world.

Learner-Leader Academy Leadership includes: Rev. Wesley Jacob, Dean; Kristine Schultz, Co-Dean; Kellye Walker-Pontius, Registrar; Rev. Jason Mahnke, DLET Chair; Rev. Jeremy Deaner, DLET Vice-Chair; Rev. Samuel Royappa, Director of Connectional Ministries.

If you are interested in learning more about LLA, contact Kellye Walker-Pontius at KWalkerPontius@WisconsinUMC.org.
In Summer 2016, Wisconsin Conference Camps (WIUMCamps) is launching a pilot day camp program, Camp in the Community, to blend a traditional, residential camp program with congregational evangelism and outreach.

One of the most unique and valuable resources that WIUMCamps brings to the Wisconsin Annual Conference is a staff of caring, committed young adults who are trained in the relational, experiential style of ministry that offers positive Christian role models for young people. We are excited to offer this resource beyond the boundaries of our camp sites to accomplish our Conference goal to Imagine Wisconsin Anew.

The purpose of Camp in the Community is two-fold. First, we are seeking to impact kids who otherwise could not come to our sites to experience the power of our camping ministry. This program meets physical needs by providing lunch and snacks to all participants, and it meets spiritual needs by teaching the same curriculum we use at our two sites.

Second, we are seeking to partner with local congregations to reach families who otherwise are not connecting with a church home. A participating congregation will work alongside the WIUMCamps staff to create an experience that best serves the year-long missional goals of the congregation.

In addition, this program encourages churches to partner with leaders in the community. The program is designed as a tool for outreach to the larger community, as well as a resource for the congregation. Each congregation should strive to invite participants who have not heard the story of Christ’s love for all people.

In this first year, we are partnering with three locations — one rural, one suburban, one urban. We are hopeful that this program will expand in future years, allowing us to have a Camp in the Community location for every week of our summer program. If you would like to donate to this ministry, please write a check to the Wisconsin Annual Conference with “Camp in the Community #7055” in the memo line.

Upcoming Locations:

June 19-24 Mount Horeb UMC  
July 24-29 Watertown: Christ UMC  
August 7-12 Webster: Grace UMC
We continue the Bible Study on the Book of Jonah, focusing on chapter two. This chapter is about the Prayer of Jonah, offered from inside the belly of the fish. Of course, it is a strange prayer chamber. In the Scriptures, we find that God’s people prayed to God from strange places and in strange circumstances. Daniel prayed in the lion’s den. Jeremiah prayed from an empty cistern. Paul prayed in a prison. Jesus prayed from a cross. But still, this was probably the first time that someone prayed from the belly of a large fish. I am sure that Jonah was not very comfortable. There is a learning insight here. Prayer is not about a time, a place, a position, and circumstance. Nothing should stop our communication with God – any time, any place, any position, and for any need. God loves us, people of prayer, more than anything.

V.2 suggests that Jonah began his prayer by recognizing that God is a prayer--answering God. It matters a lot to the readers that the one who was running away from God, realizes that God was running after him. That’s the beginning sense of repentance. Distress and crisis caused Jonah to pray spontaneously and to feel the very presence of God right inside the belly of the fish. Someone said: “Sometimes, God needs to hem us in all sides and that’s why He has to confine us in God’s space.”

V.3 reads: “...all your waves and breakers swept over me.” The waves and breakers are God’s. They can’t harm or hinder, but they can contribute to the purposes that God has for our lives. Thomas O. Chisholm would proclaim, “great
is thy faithfulness... all we have needed thy hands hath provided.”

Jonah recognizes the presence of a Creator God, the One who created the heavens and the earth, which includes the seas and fishes. Let us always remember that when we find ourselves in the midst of the waves of trouble, they are not sent to bring us down, but they are meant to bring us into life. They sweep us into the beautiful and powerful arms of God, back into His arms. The Psalmist prays in Psalm 30:1: “I will exalt you, O Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths.”

**VV.4-5** depicts the changed attitude of Jonah. He sincerely longs for a number of experiences – a new start, renewed relationship, repentance, and a willingness to mend his brokenness. There is a sense of shame on Jonah’s part, which is natural. Because of an amazing grace, Jonah did not let shame take control of his life. He was making intentional efforts to turn from shame to holy temple. This implies that he was ready to return to God for His strength, support, and counsel. More than anything, Jonah had his heart strangely warmed, as Wesley might put it. We learn here that God undertakes the protection of His people and did not permit His creation, such as water, to sweep people away. When God’s people continue to offer prayers from strange places and difficult circumstances, God of creation hears and answers. He loves us so much.

**VV.6-8** gives us the picture that Jonah almost died because he sank into the roots of mountains and the earth. The Living Bible translates the thought: “I was locked out of life and imprisoned in the land of death.” This means that when death reached out to grab him, God’s goodness was there to lift him up. Sometimes, I wonder (about my own life), where would I be today, but for the mercy and goodness of an Almighty God? But for a gracious God, I would have gone away from life and earth. Jonah not only remembered God, but also turned his ways and thoughts to Him. He recollected his past. He realized his present. He restored his future relationship with God for future ministry in Nineveh. **VERSE 9** is pivotal because Jonah realizes that the biggest spiritual problem was the replacement of grace with idols. John Calvin said: “human heart is the factory for producing idols.” The human heart was designed to receive love, grace and mercy. There is no need for substitutes. We simply trust the One who loves us continually and unconditionally.

**VV. 9-10** tells us the pledge of Jonah in response to God’s saving grace. He pledged, promised and offered praises to God. I believe the climax of Jonah’s prayer, when he cried ‘Salvation comes from the Lord,’ is one of the most powerful statements. It is the marrow of the gospel because God is the One who saves us by His amazing and everlasting grace. Jonah was running away, but God was running after him. Jonah was disobedient, but

“I was locked out of life and imprisoned in the land of death.”

God was faithful. Jonah was trying to find substitutes, but God was actively engaging with Jonah to be brought to Him. God kept offering the gifts of grace, love and mercy. Jonah’s prayer was a visible sign that he finally received the gifts by faith. Jonah experienced the heart of God’s mercy inside the belly of a big fish. **V.10** suggests that Jonah had his heart strangely warmed when the big fish vomited Jonah onto the dry land, as per the command of God. Jonah emerged as a totally changed person from the belly of the fish. Salvation came to Jonah, and sanctification continued for him. Yet there were still significant changes yet to occur in his life so that he could emerge as a matured minister of the good news. How grateful we ought to be for His mercy, not our merits, which continue to enable all of us to be saved and to serve God and people! Thanks be to God for His persistent grace!

*The Bible Study on the Book of Jonah will continue with chapter 3 in the next issue.*
In November 2015, I led a team of eight Wisconsin United Methodists to the Philip and Timothy Stains Memorial Children’s Home/Orphanage in Madurai, South India. This orphanage was founded by my brother, David Gnaniah Royappa, in 1996 with just a few orphan children. Now, 126 orphans live there in four different Homes, and 50 students attend St. John’s School.

God was working through us to prepare for His presence. Being there, working hard, getting to know one another, sharing God’s Word, and seeing the children’s smiles as they sing the national anthem and say their morning prayers; all of it was a gift. We painted rooms at the orphanage and built a playground: a slide, a merry-go-round, a see-saw, a climbing dome, and two swing sets. We built everything, basically, without instructions. Digging with an Indian shovel, which was rudimentary, was difficult to say the least, but we managed to put everything together.

Indian laws have made it difficult to run the home solely as an orphanage, so David has changed strategies and is working to turn the orphanage and St. John’s into a residential school through fifth grade. This will allow the orphans to stay, as the restrictions for schools are much less than those for an orphanage. David needs to raise another $45,000 to fully open the residential school.

We discussed fundraising ideas, as well as the idea of sponsoring the children and the teachers, who are, admittedly, very poorly paid. If you would like to donate to the orphanage, please write a check to the Wisconsin Annual Conference with “Stains Memorial Children’s Home #7940” in the memo line.

During our trip, we also worshipped at two different services. Don Tincher, a team leader on the trip, preached at both services about the Fruits of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. The services were almost identical to services back home; the main difference was the language. They even sang familiar hymns. The church service was an amazing testimony to your movement within India, Lord! Watching the people praise and worship, hands raised, with Bibles written in Tamil that were marked up and worn from reading, hearing their shouts of Hallelujah! WHAT A GIFT.

At the second service, we were able to participate in a traditional Tamil baby shower, spreading sandalwood paste on the mother-to-be’s hands and forehead. After services, we went to the Home to enjoy the Christmas Program. The children from the Home recited their Bible verses, danced, and sang for us. All of them received gifts and then they gave us gifts in return. Beautiful dried leaf bowls that had been hand-painted, clothes for the women, and books of faith.

Thank you, Lord for the opportunity to help plan for the future of St. John’s School, the Philip and Timothy Stains Memorial Children’s Home, and the vision that you have brought to David and many other Christian leaders in South India.
Let Us Live Fruit-Filled Lives

This is the fourth and final year of our Conference focus on “Living the Fruit of the Spirit.” We began this quadrennium by asking the question, "What would it take for our congregations to become known as centers of love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?" (Galatians 5:22-23) The challenge is to help the members of our congregations align behavior with beliefs. Love, joy, peace, and kindness are not just nice ideas, but crucially important actions that work to make our world a better place. Generosity, patience, self-control and faithfulness are outward and visible signs of the grace of God’s Holy Spirit at work in, with and through us.

This year’s theme at Annual Conference is “Bountiful Harvest,” and it reminds us that in God’s abundance, there is more than enough for all. There is no limit to love, no shortage of joy, no paucity of patience, or lack of generosity in God’s realm. We can build beloved community by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What can we do both individually and within our community of faith to be more loving? How can we be a source of joy for those we encounter? How can we grow as peace-makers and peace-keepers? What can we do to be more patient with people who think or feel differently than we do? How might we grow in our generosity and giving? What practices can we engage in to grow in faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Take time this year to discuss how to live the fruit of the Spirit in new, deep and meaningful ways. The world will be a better place the more fruit we share.

Keep Informed and Stay Connected!

In addition to Reflections, our print publication, we also publish a weekly Enews email newsletter, which contains timely information about important UMC events, tips and resources, and more. Visit our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/WisconsinUMC to view videos and our Flickr page at www.flickr.com/photos/WisconsinConferenceUMC to view photos from the Wisconsin Conference and The United Methodist Church. Be sure to read and post comments on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/WisconsinUMC or our Twitter page at www.twitter.com/WisconsinUMC. Additionally, visit our website at www.WisconsinUMC.org for information, tools and links to all of our communications vehicles.

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Hee-Soo Jung ..................Bishop
Michele Virnig ..................Editor
Amanda Dill .....................Associate Editor

Email: MediaContact@WisconsinUMC.org
Phone: 888-240-7328
Conference Events

**MAY 8**
Golden Cross Sunday
Mother’s Day

**MAY 10-20**
General Conference
*Portland, Oregon*

**MAY 14-15**
Change the World

**MAY 22**
Peace with Justice Sunday

**JUNE 10-13**
Wisconsin Annual Conference
*Madison Marriott*

**JUNE 19**
Father’s Day

**JULY 10-15**
Rising Sun Camp
Lake Lucerne Camp

**JULY 13-16**
North Central Jurisdictional Conference
*Peoria, IL*

**JULY 17-22**
Wildfire! Youth Mission Event
*Superior, WI*

**JULY 25-29**
Mission u
*Hotel Mead, Wisconsin Rapids*

**AUGUST 13-14**
Interfaith Bus Tour
*Madison area*

*For a more comprehensive list of events and training opportunities, visit our website www.WisconsinUMC.org*