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In the standard communion liturgy in our United Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship, there is an enormous and astounding request on the part of the whole people of God: “By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.” All too often, we gloss over these words without fully understanding or comprehending what we are asking.

The Wisconsin Annual Conference will be exploring the meaning of these declarations over the next four Annual Conference gatherings each June. This year, we focus on “One With Christ.” In 2018, we will examine what it means to be “One With Each Other.” 2019 will highlight our commitment to be “One in Ministry to All the World,” and then we will wrap this quadrennium up with a close look at what it takes to guarantee “Unity in Community.”

In the celebration of our sacrament of Holy Communion, we proclaim our desire to live as the body of Christ. We use unconditional language to move beyond who we are and where we are to commit to a vision to become who God wants us to be. There are no divisions, no judgments, no condemnation in such language. We are asking to be united in Christ, in community, and in committed service to the whole world – in spite of our disagreements and differences. We provide a witness to the world that the power of God’s Spirit in and through Christ Jesus is greater than any earthly division or divide. We seek a healing that is beyond our limited capabilities, and surrender our will to the Will of God.

This year, we will be celebrating our global partnership with the Dongbu Conference from South Korea. Our global witness to “oneness in Christ” with Dongbu spans more than two decades, and is stronger than ever. Our Conference teacher, Adam Hamilton, will focus on “Leading Beyond the Walls,” a vision that demands unity and alignment in order to be effective. We will worship and praise together for three days, with an additional Learning Day thrown in for good measure. Together, we will journey together to proclaim to the whole, wide world, by God’s Spirit, we are One with Christ, now and for all time.
Don’t Miss Wisconsin Annual Conference!

We look forward to seeing you June 16 – 19 at the Madison Marriott West! Visit www.tinyurl.com/WAC2017 for all the information you need to know about this year’s Annual Conference. Other highlights of this year’s gathering include:

» Bible Study with Adam Hamilton
» Music throughout the weekend from worship leader Marcia McFee
» Oneida Drum Circle smudging and sanctifying our worship and plenary areas
» Opening worship with preacher Bishop Heon Young Choi
» Retiree recognition and worship service

» Presentation of Harry Denman, Thelma Gregg, Perry Salto, Love in Action, and Francis Asbury awards
» Celebration of new church starts and Institute of Congregational Development
» Ordination and Commissioning service with preacher Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Special Events for Youth

» Youth culture panel and presentation
» Young clergy gathering with Adam Hamilton

Many Ways to Get Resources and Get the News!

» Download the Conference App on your mobile device – visit www.tinyurl.com/WAC2017 for instructions.
» Visit the Communications tables for Conference literature, DVDs and other resources for you and your church.
 » Stop in the Middleton room to use a laptop, recharge your devices, get help with WiFi or other technology questions, make copies, and print documents.
» New this year, charge your laptops, phones, tablets, and other electronic devices at one of our handy charging stations in multiple locations.
» Join the conversation on Facebook (facebook.com/WisconsinUMC) and Twitter (twitter.com/WisconsinUMC), and check our Flickr page (flickr.com/wisconsinconferenceumc) for new pictures every day during Conference. Use the hashtag #wiumc to talk about Annual Conference on social media.
» Check your inbox for daily Enews reports from Annual Conference. Sign up for Enews at www.WisconsinUMC.org/subscribe. Daily reports are also posted to www.WisconsinUMC.org.
» View the live stream of events from Friday, Saturday and Sunday at www.WisconsinUMC.org/connections/annual-conference/live-streaming-video.

Attend a Pre-Conference Briefing in Your District on May 20

All members to Annual Conference are encouraged to attend a Pre-Conference briefing in your district on Saturday, May 20. Topics include an update on the Feasibility Study for the State-Wide Fundraising Campaign, Constitutional Amendments from General Conference 2016, Annual Conference 101 Tips, the proposed 2018 Budget, and a preview of highlights from this year’s Annual Conference.

• North Central District
  Stevens Point: The Springs
  600 Wilshire Blvd.
  Stevens Point, WI 54481
  9 - 11:30 a.m.

• North East District
  Neenah: Faith UMC
  1025 Tullar Road
  Neenah, WI 54956
  9 - 11:30 a.m.

• North West District
  Shell Lake UMC
  135 Reinhart Dr.
  Shell Lake, WI 54871
  10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

• South East District
  West Bend: Fifth Avenue UMC
  323 S. 5th Ave
  West Bend, WI 53095
  9 - 11:30 a.m.

• South West District
  Madison: Asbury
  6101 University Ave.
  Madison, WI 53705
  9 - 11:30 a.m.
All around our globe, we hear stories of people waging war against one another. It may take the form of a military conflict between countries, or it may be a culture war between progressive and conservative thinkers, or even within our own United Methodist connection over human sexuality. Everywhere, differences of opinion are cast as conflict, with push and shove, aggression and anger. Come on! Is this any way to be? I don’t find it in the vision of Jesus from the gospels, or in the teachings of Paul. Christians do not wage war; Christians wage peace.

This is a courageous and counter-cultural act. It maintains that we are not simply bound to react to what we see with our eyes, but to respond graciously and lovingly to the things we know in our hearts. It calls us to be kingdom builders in everything we say and do. Waging peace is a new way to be – it is God’s will for God’s people in all of God’s creation.

Our United Methodist Church waits anxiously to hear from the Commission on A Way Forward. For decades, disagreements over human sexuality, the authority and interpretation of scripture, and the doctrinal morality code have divided our Church. My great fear is that we await the findings of our commission thinking like winners and losers. This “us/them” dichotomy is a false distinction. Regardless of the decisions made, certain things do not change.

First, we will still be brothers and sisters in Christ, bound together by our baptism – whether we like it or not. You may choose your friends, but you are stuck with your family! So why don’t we begin working together, praying together, now for peace and our own way forward. We may still not agree with each other, but we can make a conscious effort to focus on and celebrate what unites us, instead of being distracted by our differences.

Second, we are in ministry to all the world. We have a ministry to LGBTQ brothers and sisters, regardless of our doctrine and polity. We are God’s incarnation, to offer grace, healing, gentleness, love, and mercy to ALL people.

Third, we are all unfinished. We have much work to do to grow in our discipleship and to become the Christian covenant community God intends and expects us to be.

Fourth, we do not have time to waste. Our world is in crisis. Our world is in distress. It is time to set aside the agendas and concerns, and be a faithful witness to the world. I think of the analogy of one foot on a boat and one on a dock. The dock is our own positions and desires; the boat is the world waiting to receive the good news of Jesus Christ in love, grace, joy, and justice. Which way will we step? Will we stay on the dock, or will we step out in faith into the boat? This doesn’t mean our differences are unimportant. It means that we have the power to choose, to continue to fight and wage war or to move forward and wage peace. It is not an easy decision, but it is the most important one we can make.
Bishop Jung spent time with more than 330 clergy and nearly 100 laity throughout the state during his annual Clergy Days Apart in each district and Laity Leadership Convocation at Watertown: Christ UMC. At both the clergy and laity events, attendees worshipped together, and discussed how I Thessalonians 5:1-28 invites us to explore how we are called by God. “You are the light,” Bishop Jung said to laity. “That means you have a power and a calling to do something holy. When you wake up with that reality, you are passionate and energized. That's why Paul invites you and me to understand clearly who we are. When you know who you are, and whose you are, you know you are not in darkness, in manipulation, or in fear.”

Additionally, laity had the opportunity to attend a variety of break out sessions and trainings. Topics included Vitalizing a Local Church for Work in Its Mission Field by General Board of Church and Society Organizing Program Coordinator Rebecca Cole, a General Conference Update led by several Wisconsin delegates, An Overview of Our Sister Relationship with Dongbu Conference led by North Central District Superintendent Forrest Wells, Connectional Giving 101 led by Director of Finance and Administration Tamara Wims, and Vital New Faith Communities led by pastors Gary Cole of Sugar River UMC and Juan Garay of Urban Poeima.

At their Days Apart, clergy sat at round tables in assigned seats that allowed for conversations with people they may not normally see. In the South East, District Superintendent Scott Carlson talked about how he hoped the conversations during the Day Apart would shape the Church in Wisconsin. “My hope is that we can come to this place and dare to set aside convictions that allow us to fear each other,” he said. “We are good at talking to each other, but poor at listening to each other and the heart of God... it’s not just us and the church members, or the Cabinet, or the Conference staff; there is only us as United Methodist followers of Christ. May we claim that today.”
Imagine Wisconsin Anew is all about inviting new people — diverse people, young people, elderly people, all people — into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are called to reach out beyond ourselves and buildings to plant new ministries, engage our multicultural communities, revitalize existing congregations, create soul food, and establish mercy and justice efforts around Wisconsin and the world. Over the next few years, the Wisconsin Conference is committed to exploring together what God is asking us to do. Our United Methodist Churches have answered the call to Imagine Wisconsin Anew in a variety of ways. Here are some of their stories:

**Waukesha: Salem UMC Commits to Renewable Energy**

Waukesha: Salem’s Ad Council recently voted to go 100% renewable energy for their church building. Member Becky Henderson said the increase in WE Energies bill will be less than $40/month. “Interim pastor Bill Church started with a pledge of two months... but several others chimed in with an additional two months, and now we have a year. During that time, we intend to spread it around the congregation.” She said they plan to add the initiative into the 2018 budget, and begin a campaign with highway signs, brochures, and articles in local press. “We needed a little enthusiasm and I think we caught it,” Henderson said.

**Holcombe UMC Raises $600 for Local EMT Units**

On Saturday, February 25, Holcombe UMC hosted its “Oh-Soul-O’-Me-O” Italian Dinner. Over $600 was generated by the event, with all proceeds designated for the Cornell Area Ambulance and EMT Units. Eleven EMT’s attended and received several rounds of appreciative applause. Bill Stimeling said, “Over 100 folks from the area turned out, and the four-course meal was much appreciated and adjudged as delicious! Live piano music was provided throughout the evening, and attendees danced whenever songs of the 40s and 50s were played.”

**Merrill: Christ UMC Makes Dresses for Africa**

Merrill: Christ United Methodist Church held a sewing day on March 25th for “Little Dresses for Africa.” There were fifteen people helping with this mission, including members of Christ UMC, Gleason: Wildwood Chapel, plus various churches around the Merrill area. In addition, there were materials donated to help make the dresses. Approximately 50 dresses were made and shipped to those in need. Christ UMC normally hosts a sewing day in the spring and sometimes in the fall.

**Milwaukee: Albright UMC Shelters Homeless During Cold Spells**

The All’s Bright project at Milwaukee: Albright UMC is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in the winter, when the high temperature for the day is predicted to be below 20 degrees. All’s Bright opens its doors from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. as a safe, warm place where those on the street can come to warm up, have a cup of hot coffee, and socialize. Most of the overnight shelters open at 6 p.m., so Albright makes calls for the visitors to locate beds for them for the night. Additionally, twice a year, officers and other volunteers hit the streets for 12 hours to locate the homeless, and attempt to bring them in to a safe location for the night. Lynne Hines Levy said,
“This year, our wonderful partners ensured that we and our guests had plenty of food to last through the night, as well as a good supply of coats, hats, gloves and socks to send along with them as they went out on their way. They also had the golden opportunity to spend one-on-one time with volunteers from the Veterans Association (yes, many homeless are vets), and a transitional housing specialist, as well as our wonderful volunteers from Albright and New Hope Hmong UMC.”

Madison: First UMC Holds Interfaith Brunch

Madison: First UMC held an Interfaith Brunch on January 7. “A wonderful time was had by all participants,” Marjorie Matthews said. “We had a very good turnout of women of various faiths (Muslim, Christian and others), and we enjoyed food, fellowship, and an enlightening panel of Muslim women who gave a short presentation and answered audience questions. The Raging Grannies of Madison also sang, providing some entertainment. This was our first joint meal and time of sharing on a large scale, but will not be our last!”

Kenosha: First UMC Youth Raise Money for Soup Kitchen

Children at Kenosha: First UMC raised just under $1,000 for Kenosha’s Shalom Center Soup Kitchen during their yearly fundraiser effort. In addition to selling ceramic bowls that the Sunday School children made, they collected donations after each service. They also organized a soup luncheon to collect more donations.

Appleton Emmanuel UMC Invites Elementary School Neighbor to Pay It Forward

In the past year, Appleton: Emmanuel UMC has been in mission with its neighbor, Edison Elementary School, by collecting books and volunteering as reading partners with students. In turn, an art teacher at the school got the students to make coloring books that could be used by patients and family members at Children’s Hospital in Neenah. But the school needed a partner to help gather art supplies, as well as create something to store the coloring books. The United Methodist Women from Emmanuel Church gathered materials and invited all of the congregation’s sewers to participate. Fifty tote bags were produced to hold the donated art supplies from Emmanuel Church members and the coloring books made by Edison Students.
I have just returned from my second pilgrimage to Israel through the Wisconsin Annual Conference, led by The Society of Biblical Studies. It was an honor for me to be one of the leaders of this group of 14 people from around Wisconsin and the United States.

In 2016, I attended my first pilgrimage to the Holy Land, hosted by Bishop Jung. Last year, I naively went on this trip, looking forward to seeing the land of our ancestors of faith. I was excited to “walk where Jesus walked.” I was completely surprised what happened to me on this journey. It was because of my amazement that I became committed to helping our Annual Conference return regularly to participate in such pilgrimages.

While on my second pilgrimage in 2017, it happened to me again. I was amazed and inspired by the experience. The reality is that each time I go, my faith is deepened and my understanding of the world is enlarged. Because these trips have become so meaningful for me, I want to share with everyone I love and care about how important such a pilgrimage could be in their/your life.

There are three main ways these pilgrimages have changed me. First, they helped me learn more about the Scriptures. It has been described that the land of the Holy Land is the fifth Gospel. That has certainly been my experience. Just being in the place that is talked about in the Holy Scriptures opens up how I hear the stories anew.

For example, when in Nazareth, I had a chance to see how a first century home may have looked. The home consisted of just a few rooms. One was a living area, where the food was prepared. Where, at night, the bed mats were laid out and where, during bad weather, the animals received shelter (like a stable). Seeing this house helped me hear the birth stories very differently.

In the past, when I thought of Jesus’ birth, as recorded in Luke, I imagined a stable-like place. I thought of the stable as a separate structure, similar to a barn, where the animals were housed. In my mind, Jesus was born in a stable, separate from people. Yet, when I saw a home in Nazareth, I realized that if Jesus was born in a stable, he was likely born in a home surrounded by animals as well as people. It was one of my many “a-ha” moments.

Secondly, the pilgrimages helped me understand the living conditions in today’s Holy Land. One of the real gifts of traveling to Israel and Palestine was my realization that it’s much safer than I thought. If I believed all of the news that I see on TV, I would think those places were extremely dangerous. Yet, what I have learned is that Massachusetts (which is
roughly the size of Israel/Palestine) has a 4% higher crime rate than Israel and Palestine. And Florida has a 17% higher crime rate than Massachusetts. Believe it or not, it is more risky to go to Florida than it is to go to Israel or Palestine.

While we were on this pilgrimage, almost daily we were introduced to a speaker who could articulate and address the current issues taking place in Israel and Palestine. We heard from a former soldier in the Israeli Army about how destructive the occupation of Palestine is for the soul of Israel. A Palestinian Christian explained what it means to live under occupation. We also heard from a Palestinian Muslim what occupation feels like. In the past, we met others who are working toward building bridges and making peace.

This has been a very important part of the pilgrimage. We don’t just go on a sight-seeing tour. We are on a pilgrimage to learn and to grow, not just about the scriptures, but also to learn how to be a better world citizen.

The last learning experience I’d like to share is how my world has been enlarged by each pilgrimage. Over the last two years, I met wonderful, beautiful people, who are a lot like people in the U.S. – people whom I have come to know and love. I have been exposed to terrific food and drink. I have experienced new traditions. I now see the world is much smaller than I thought.

The reality is that my faith has deepened. The scriptures have come to mean so much more to me. I now see the world is much smaller than I thought.

At the end of my first pilgrimage, I couldn’t wait to return. This year, about four days into the journey, my wife Debbie was particularly moved and said, “I can’t wait to come back next year.” In all honesty, I too can’t wait until my return in 2018.

Our 2018 trip will be led by Bishop Hee-Soo Jung. We will travel on our ten-day journey from March 7 – 17. We will travel to Jordan for our next four-day add on trip. Visit www.wisconsinumc.org for a copy of the brochure for next year’s trip. It is my hope that if you would like to see your faith grow, deepen, and be enhanced, that you will consider traveling with us on our next pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine.

If you have any questions, feel free to give Forrest Wells or me a call.
Many of our congregations have a tradition of handing out an illustrated children’s Bible as a baptismal gift. Others give third-graders a Bible in the fall. Confirmands may receive study Bibles for the first time. But it’s not often that at camp, we get to give a student their first Bible.

In Summer 2016, one of our Camp in the Community sites was in Siren. On the first day, we were introduced to Will*, an 11-year-old boy. His mother had died only months earlier, and he had moved in with an aunt and uncle across the street from the church. They had no connection with The United Methodist Church, but since Camp in the Community was close, they thought this was a good way for Will to get out of the house.

During the first few days, it was clear that Will had never connected with a church. He had never really heard of God, and he was pretty skeptical of the Bible stories he was hearing. But he enjoyed hanging out with the group, often staying as late as possible into the afternoon to ask the counselors good questions.

On that Thursday, he mentioned to the counselors that he wished he had a Bible of his own. The church staff found a brand new Bible in the office, and the counselors took it home that night. They bookmarked the stories they had read at camp that week. Each counselor wrote Will a personal note in the front cover. They also bookmarked their favorite Bible stories. Then they bookmarked other things too. After they were done, this Bible was a work of art – and love. When the Bible was presented to Will on Friday, the last day of camp, his face lit up.

We don’t know what amazing stories will emerge from Summer Camp 2017, but we hope you or your children will be there to experience them! Register now at www.WIUMCamps.org.

*Name changed to protect the child’s identity.
Empower Generosity Through eGiving

Do you offer ways for your church members to give electronically? Have you considered the eGiving option, but thought the costs were not worth it? Our world is moving closer and closer to using electronic payments as the primary method of monetary transactions, and it’s more important than ever to make giving opportunities quick and simple. As a Church, we are reliant upon people’s ability to give in order to keep our ministries and churches supported.

Today’s congregation expects to interact with the church in a way that is consistent with the rest of their life. They can engage with their gyms, banks, and retail stores online from any place or at any time. What’s more, the Federal Reserve predicts that by the year 2026, paper checks will be virtually extinct. Sounds scary, right? It doesn’t have to be!

There are so many benefits to offering eGiving opportunities. Churches using eGiving see an overall increase in their income, especially when offering debit and credit card giving options. eGiving allows donors to give in the moment, no matter whether or not they have cash, and insulates churches from attendance dips. The average church member misses 7-10 church services a year, so eGiving allows members to donate even when they cannot make the weekly service.

Your Conference Finance Office and United Methodist Foundation have been working on your behalf, and would like to share with you the Empowering Generosity initiative. With this initiative, you have the opportunity to sign up your church for eGiving with Vanco without paying the enrollment fee or monthly service fee for 12 months. You will also receive a $100 check from our Wisconsin UM Foundation to offset transaction fees.

There are many advantages to accepting electronic giving, as well as opportunities for additional and unexpected resources to reach our churches. Still, each church has its own decision to make, and circumstances to consider. Your Finance Office and United Methodist Foundation hope you will at least be knowledgeable of the direction in which the world is moving, and make the decision that feels right to you.

Please be sure to meet with your Finance Committee, and enroll as soon as possible. The opportunity to waive enrollment fees will end in June!

For more information on Empowering Generosity, and the support you can obtain, visit www.wisconsinumc.org/finance or www.wumf.org. To enroll your church in eGiving with Vanco Payment Solutions, call (800) 675-7430.

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. You can sign up to receive Enews or share your story or event by emailing MVirnig@WisconsinUMC.org.

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Conferences Events

JUNE 4
Pentecost

JUNE 11
Peace with Justice
Special Sunday

JUNE 16 – 19
Wisconsin Annual Conference
Madison Marriott West

JUNE 18
Father’s Day

JULY 4
Independence Day

JULY 9 – 14
Rising Sun Camp
Lake Lucerne

JULY 9 – 14
Wildfire! Youth
Mission Event
Superior, WI

JULY 24 – 28
Mission U
Wisconsin Rapids

AUGUST 18 – 20
Bishop’s Interfaith Bus Tour
Milwaukee

AUGUST 21 – 22
New Clergy Orientation
Pine Lake

SEPTEMBER 4
Labor Day

SEPTEMBER 13 – 14
School for Ministry
Green Lake

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