

2024 WI Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church Report

by
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Sarah and I attended The 2024 Wisconsin United Methodist Church Annual Conference, held in Green Bay, back in early June. It brought together clergy and lay members under the theme "Abundant God, Beloved Community." The conference focused on themes of spiritual renewal, community, and navigating the challenges and opportunities facing the church in a post-General Conference era. For a quick read, we've condensed the 12 hours of plenary sessions and the 14-page report on the Conference website (which you can read in its entirety at www.wisconsinumc.org).

Each morning we had an opening session including worship and Bible study, followed by plenary where we considered and voted on several action items and heard reports from various committees. The morning Bible study was led by Dr. Roger Nam from Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. The study was titled "An Abundant Promise to Abraham" based on Genesis 17:6-8. To hear more from the Bible study, please visit the conference website: www.wisconsinumc.org.

1. General Conference Context:

- Bishop Jung underscored the significance of this being the first annual conference after the postponed General Conference of 2020, signaling a new chapter for the church in Wisconsin. He talked about the centrality of Jesus in our life, saying, "It's all about Jesus. It's not you; it's not me; it's not us; it's all about Jesus...Are we listening?"

2. Statistical Report and Financial Overview:

- Our Conference Statistician presented a report indicating a continuing decline in membership but a slight increase in average weekly worship attendance as well as an increase in Vacation Bible School participation.
- The proposed 2025 budget was discussed, highlighting challenges such as an anticipated change in church insurance coverage, decreased general-church giving, potential leadership changes, and the financial implications of sharing a bishop with Northern Illinois. Yes, you read that right...the WI Conference will share a bishop with Northern Illinois. This is not a merger. Rather, each Conference will keep its Conference office (so ours stays in Sun Prairie and Northern IL keeps theirs) and a new office will be set up for WI and Northern IL in Glenview IL. This decision is part of a broader trend within the United Methodist Church, reflecting decreasing membership (the WI Conference membership is about 25% of what it was in 1968 when we became United Methodists) and decreasing financial resources across conferences. Related to this...we passed an action item changing the number of districts in our conference from five to four. It was called Four Districts for a Revived! Church.

3. New Ministries and Leadership Development:

- Currently, the Conference supports 23 new ministries, and has a system in place for beginning new ministries and developing new leaders. Also, as we are well aware of right here in our own Church, congregational renewal is occurring in the form of MCCI.
- The Revive! Community Development Planning Team presented a significant proposal to reallocate funds from closed churches to support new ministry initiatives. It will provide consulting for local churches such as ours looking to “right-size” our building, engage in church and community assessment, and offer our church leaders information on how to maintain and expand opportunities to be of service to our local community. This move is seen as essential for the church's future growth.

Bishop's Address and Final Remarks: Bishop Hee-Soo Jung delivered a heartfelt state-of-the-church address, reflecting on his 12 years of service. I can still remember him appearing at our church as part of his initiative to visit all the churches in our Conference. He emphasized the importance of love, justice, and community in the church's mission. The conference concluded with expressions of gratitude and a renewed commitment to the future. Sadly, Bishop Jung leaves us as he is moving on to a new Annual Conference after September. He concluded his address with, “Wisconsin, you are the best state. You raised me; you raised my family. You are beautiful people. Thank you and thank you and thank you. Amen.”

Retirements and Recognitions: A service was held to honor 18 retirees. This service was marked by a moving “Passing of the Mantle” ceremony where retiring clergy passed their stoles to new ordinands (numbering about 8), symbolizing the continuity of ministry. Just as Bishop Jung is retiring from the WI Conference of the United Methodist Church, we are retiring from our role as lay members after 10 Annual Conferences. It's been our privilege and a blessing to serve in this role. We would like to “pass the mantle” to two of you giving you an opportunity to serve in this role when the location changes back to Middleton at the Marriott Madison West next year.

The 2024 Annual Conference was a time of reflection, decision-making, and spiritual renewal. It addressed the pressing issues facing the church while celebrating the community and preparing for the future. The conference's decisions will shape the direction of the Wisconsin United Methodist Church in the years to come, as it seeks to grow and adapt in a changing world.

Finally, we'll leave you with this quote and a comment: “Life is risky. It's so risky, you don't get out of it alive.” –Jim Rohn We are born from God's eternity, and we die to God's eternity. And in between, we are here in this risky life, which brings us more challenges than we would ever want to happen to us. And it has more beauty and blessing in it than we could ever imagine, in fact, than we are aware of. Thank you!