

## **Annual Conference Report 2023 by Kurt and Sarah Zarbock**

We attended the 2023 Annual Conference virtually again this year. The physical Conference took place at the KI Convention Center in Green Bay. This year's theme: "On Earth as it is in Heaven" - Engaging in Transformative Community Building and is based on scripture from Philippians 2.

### **Worship Services**

The Annual Conference featured an opening worship service and three main worship services throughout the Conference. As has become the tradition of the Wisconsin Annual Conference, an Oneida drum circle preceded opening worship. Rev. Sue D'Alessio recognized the First Nations' lands upon which we gather. Rev. Barb Certa-Werner, in her new role as Assistant to the Bishop, led the assembly in an opening prayer invoking the Spirit's presence. Opening worship followed.

Throughout the weekend, the Annual Conference used video presentations, live speakers and votes on action items and dialogue to accomplish its business. Frequently, Bishop Jung led us in song when gathering and during vote tabulation. All action items presented to the body for vote passed. For a complete list of the action items voted on and the results please see the 2023 Annual Conference Summary. Here is a link to the full report:

<http://www.Wisconsinumc.org/news-detail/17462674>. Some highlights of significant action items follow.

### **Moving Forward with the Beloved Community in WI—Post Disaffiliation Vote**

Bishop Jung prefaced the vote reading from a prepared statement, saying in part, "Connectionalism is at the heart of what it means to be a United Methodist ... While many of us lament these decisions, we must respect the discernment that has taken place. It is not a time for taking sides, expressing anger or cheering and clapping. It is a time for prayer and generous care for one another."

Rev. Paul Gregerson, chair of the Conference Trustees, brought forth resolutions from 43 churches (which still leaves 446 churches with about 47,000 members) seeking to disaffiliate under section 2553 of the Book of Discipline, which provided a limited window of time for congregations to do so, for reasons of conscience over issues of human sexuality. The main vote followed, preceded by Bishop Jung's prayer, and followed – while awaiting the vote results – by singing *Come and Fill our Hearts with your Grace/Peace/Love*.

**Result of vote to disaffiliate**, Action item wc 400 – Approved 461 yes, 32 no.



*Dr. Viera, Garrett Theological Seminary, Leads Bible Study for Annual Conference Day 2 Opening Worship*

## **Day 2**

The day began with an opening devotion led by the worship team from Waupaca Area Regional Ministry. Speaking in Spanish, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung welcomed Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary President Javier A. Viera (originally from Puerto Rico), who was introduced by Rev. Barb Certa-Werner. Viera recalled the Bishop's "simple invitation" to come to the Conference and offer a Bible study that would help "continue radical inclusion and racial justice as the priority of our missional direction." "An easy task, right?" Viera said.

"This country is rightfully obsessed with a narrative that implies a binary: black and white. I am not. Stepping into this conversation is risky. It is not the only reckoning that is necessary. (e.g., the reckoning with native peoples, Hispanic Latino peoples, Asian-Pacific islanders).

"When we are at our best as a church, liminal [occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold] spaces are where we are at our best, where we have difficult conversations that lead to healing and reconciliation, that allow us to encounter God in truthful ways. People are afraid to go to these places. But that's a core of our mission as the church."

## **Ingathering a Success at Annual Conference 2023**

According to Conference sources, "Ingathering 2023 was a huge success and we are awed by your generosity. You are people with hearts for service and love of others. The truck was jammed packed with donations. As Ingathering 2023 ended we barely had room for our drivers, Chuck and Karen's luggage, and were still able to close the door!



“You brought in 1,456 Personal Dignity kits, far outdoing last year’s 977. You also brought 246 Home Care kits, so many sewing machines, medical equipment, bikes, school kits, shampoo, laundry detergent, blankets & more weighing in at 15,720 lbs. In 2 days a total of \$5,161.66 was donated.”

**2023 Budget Presented by Sarah Sneider, Conference Treasurer and Director of Administration**

Nearly 240 local churches paid 100% of their 2022 apportionments. The Conference budgeted to receive \$6.1 million in apportionment revenue in 2022. The Conference received \$6 million.

Other Financial Report Highlights:

- Global Connections paid to General Council Finance and Administration was 100%
- Sales of closed churches netted \$555,000 to Foundation for New Ministry
- The Conference received about \$4 million from disaffiliating churches (unpaid apportionments, 12 months of apportionments, benefit premiums paid for May & June 2023, unfunded pension liability, estimated legal fees (\$10,000 each))
- Boy Scout settlement: Allocated settlement cost for Wisconsin Conference is \$208,096. Additional donations or reserve needed: \$157,719.
- 2024 budget was presented
  - Details on Pages 31-45 of Part 1 of the Pre-Conference Workbook.
  - Disaffiliating churches represented \$880,000 in apportionments

- To not punish remaining churches, estimated gross apportionments were reduced accordingly. A portion of the disaffiliating funds received will be applied to the 2024 budget.
- Most committee budgets kept the same
- General Church increased \$130,000

Next year's Conference will be exclusively in person. Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have about this year's Annual Conference.