

SPIRE Newsletter



February 2020

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CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

Feb. 16 – Baptism
Feb. 16 – Post-service session for the congregation
Feb. 23 – All Children's Service; New Members inducted
Feb. 26 – Ash Wednesday Service at St. Boniface at 7 pm
Mar. 1 – Children's Ministries to create resurrection gardens
Mar. 15 – Lenten Cantata

WORSHIP MUSIC

Feb. 2 – Kaet Sisney and Ellen Shuler
Feb. 9 – Sanctuary Choir
Feb. 16 – Women's Choir
Feb. 23 – Kaet Sisney
Feb. 26 – Ash Wednesday – Sanctuary Choir at St. Boniface

Meet MUMC's New Director of Children's Ministries



Gayle Meyer, Director of Children's Ministries

The Staff Parish Relations Committee is pleased to share that Gayle Meyer has accepted the position of Director of Children's Ministries.

Gayle graduated from the University of Wisconsin with double degrees in Social Work and Psychology. She worked as an assistant buyer for Boston Store as a first career, then changed direction and began teaching preschool. Gayle has taught at several schools in Mequon and West Bend. She has been a volunteer for many years teaching Sunday school at MUMC. She is also very involved with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation raising funds and organizing events. As a type 1 diabetic, she knows first hand how important it is to find a cure.

Gayle and her husband, Jim, have lived in Mequon for 28 years and have two sons, Ben and

From the Pastor

"How would you lead MUMC after the special General Conference in February next year?" This was a question that I was asked by a member of the MUMC Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) when I had the introductory meeting with them two years ago in February 2018.

My response was: *I don't have the answer to make everything certain and everyone happy regarding the challenge we face in our denomination. But I do know one thing that our Lord has made crystal clear for all believers to know and remember at a time such as this, and that is the unity of all believers. He prayed for our unity on the night before he was crucified (John 17). So I will do my best to strengthen the unity of the church that I serve as their pastor.*

Our Administrative Council and I have done our best to strengthen the unity of MUMC since the special General Conference in February 2019, and we will continue to do that after the General Conference in May 2020 and beyond. Friends, the unity of our church does not hinge on a proposal the General Conference may or may not adopt in May, but on Christ Jesus. MUMC has always belonged to and will belong to Jesus. He is the head of MUMC and we are the Body of Christ. The Mission of the Body of Christ is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (Matthew 28:19 – 20). That is our identity.

Now let me share what Gary E. Mueller, a United Methodist bishop, said in his article entitled "It's Still About Your Church" regarding the possible separation of our denomination after the General Conference in May:

Embrace your identity. Your church is literally the Body of Christ. So act like it! Love Jesus, follow Jesus, grow in Jesus, be transformed in Jesus and share Jesus in ways that make it clear whose you are. Get serious about investing in those things that form you as the Body of Christ: prayer, Bible study, involving people in intentional discipling groups and reaching out to your neighborhood in ways that touch real people in real ways with real love...Jesus uses your church, and the disciples in it, to continue his mission of making disciples, forming disciples, and equipping and sending disciples to transform lives, communities and the world... Almost every congregation has figured out how to thrive with a diverse group of people who have perspectives that are diametrically opposed. Don't see this as a problem; see it as a wonderful opportunity to show how Jesus brings together people who normally wouldn't give each other the time of day...The future of your church is not dependent upon what happens in the United Methodist Church. Don't let the uncertainty, or brokenness, paralyze you. Move ahead boldly and confidently. Your church will still be part of the Body of Christ. Your church will still make disciples of Jesus Christ. Your church will still form deeper disciples. And your church will still equip and send disciples to transform lives, communities, and the world.

So believers, let us remember the prayer that our Lord prayed for you and me at a time such as this, press on toward the goal He has given us, and encourage one another to finish our race of faith fruitful, strong, and triumphant TOGETHER: *"My prayer is not for them (the 12 disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* (John 17:20 – 21 NIV)

In Christ,
Sue Lee

Growth Group Study Starts February 6

MUMC's February/March Growth Group Study, **Making Sense of the Bible**, will be hosted by members of our new Social Justice Team, using material guides produced by Pastor Adam Hamilton. This DVD study is designed for group discussion.

"Wondrously accessible, Hamilton combines good scholarship with a light touch and exhibits his wise, generous pastoral heart. Hamilton does not let us forget that he bears witness to the gospel, and the result is discussion that permits readers to think again and faithfully about the Bible." Walter Brueggeman, Columbia Theological Seminary.

Feb. 6: Making Sense of the Old Testament
Feb. 13: Making Sense of the New Testament
Feb. 20: Questions about the Nature of Scripture
Feb. 27: The Bible and Science
Mar. 5: Violence, Suffering, and Other Troubling Issues
Mar. 12: Wrestling with Issues of Sexuality and Relationships

To accommodate your busy schedule, each session will be offered on Thursdays at noon and 6 pm. The noon sessions will be in the parlor at MUMC, hosted by Connie Pukaite. The 6 pm sessions will be hosted by Joel and Karen Huffman in their home.

The sign-up sheet is in the narthex. Please sign up for the study! If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Sue or Connie Pukaite.

Announcements

Please come and celebrate together
as a church family as Courtney and Shaun Cooper are baptized on February 16.

Help us welcome new members on February 23 as Kevin and Sara Cooper and Charles and Emily Penner are inducted into church membership. Please come and show your warm welcome!

If you have forgotten to return your financial pledge card for 2020, it's not too late to turn it in! If you have never made a financial pledge, we encourage you to make that commitment this year to express your love for God and support of MUMC ministries. You can also email your pledge to the Finance Committee. Your pledge helps our Financial Team plan MUMC's 2020 budget with more predictability.

The MUMC Finance Committee would like to thank the congregation for their generosity in supporting the 2020 Stewardship Campaign. We have received pledges so far that will keep the giving level virtually equal to the level in 2019 even though we lost numerous giving members last year. We are blessed to have such a committed and caring group of

MUMC community gardens now taking applications.
Anyone interested in gardening in our community gardens this year should submit a registration form.

Forms available on the community garden link on the MUMC website.



Dorothy Schmidt, a long-time active member, passed away on January 16, 2020. Your prayers for God's comfort and strength for her family are very appreciated.

In Christ,
Pastor Sue

Mark your calendars for

members and friends.

If you are ever interested in joining a choir, the music staff always welcomes new members! Please talk to any staff member: Michelle Hynson, Rick Hynson, Ellen Shuler, or Elna Hickson.

We are busy preparing a **Lenten Cantata** for March 15. Be sure to save the date to attend this powerful SERVICE OF SHADOWS!

"My Verse for 2020" Please sign your name to find out your prayer buddy in 2020! 75 out of 82 scripture verse cards have been chosen, but there are only 54 names on the "Standing on the Promise of God in 2020" clip board. Without signing your name on the clip board, you and your partner can't find out who your prayer buddy is! You may ask her/him how you can pray for them, and include them in your prayers as you pray for your loved ones. Let's pray together as we stand on the promises of God in 2020!

March 1.

Following our church service, Children's Ministries would like to invite you to create a Resurrection Garden to reflect, prepare, and grow in faith during Lent. Nurture your garden and roll away the stone on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus!



Mealsite served at least 150 people on Thursday, January 23! We hope to do the same on Thursday, January 30 (the fifth Thursday of the month). Thank you to all who helped out.

Come join us on February 23 for an All Children's Service. Enjoy the Children and Youth of MUMC as they lead us in a joyful celebration of faith.

Please check the table next to the coat room in the Narthex for news of General Conference (May 5 – 15, 2020). You can also get more news on the United Methodist Church worldwide at umnews.org.

Volunteers

Greeters

Feb. 2 – The Wendy Porterfield Family
Feb. 9 – Mike & Chris Debbink
Feb. 16 – Ross & Jean Paulos
Feb. 23 – Cindy Gallun & Irene Sullivan
Mar. 1 – Kevin & Sara Cooper

Coffee Hosts

Feb. 2 – Darwin & Cindy Shaurette
Feb. 9 – Jeff & Lynda Stephany
Feb. 16 – Jeff & Marie Widder
Feb. 23 – Jim & Pam Layton
Mar. 1 – Ann Miller & **Volunteer Needed**

Ushers

Feb. 2 – Ann Miller & Busch Buschman
Feb. 9 – Marilyn Zwissler & Jim Layton
Feb. 16 – Jeff & Lynda Stephany
Feb. 23 – Connie Pukaite & Kay Schroeder
Mar. 1 – **Volunteers Needed**

Liturgists

Feb. 2 – Connie Pukaite
Feb. 9 – Marcia Schwager
Feb. 16 – Marcia Schwager
Feb. 23 – Volunteer Needed
Mar. 1 – Volunteer Needed

Flowers

Feb. 2 – The Zwisslers
Feb. 9 – Volunteer Needed
Feb. 16 – The Coopers
Feb. 23 – Ann Miller
Mar. 1 – Volunteer Needed



Monthly Youth Group Yodel

In January, the youth group made an outing to support Andrew Carter at his swim meet

against Whitefish Bay. Andrew did a wonderful job and we are sure professional swimming is in his future. The drive-in movie was a success. Thank you to everyone who came out to support the children's ministries. The youth took and filled food orders during the movie. A phenomenal time was had by all. We were also present at the outreach auction where we helped with set up of the event as well as shared some fond memories from the mission trip. In February, the youth will be supporting Kaet at her performances at Homestead. Be sure to come out if you have time to see. The information for the performances can be found in her profile below. Be sure to stay tuned for more youth updates this month. There will be a Kopps and Khrist excursion with a date TBD.

Youth Profile of the Month: Kaet Sisney

Kaet has been a member of MUMC ever since she was born. Her first mission trip was to Erie, Pennsylvania in 2018 and she "had a lot of fun and grew a lot." It was her first ever mission trip and she is really looking forward to going on the upcoming trip to Rochester, New York. Kaet is very involved with school choir and theater and she enjoys studying the french horn and playing in the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra. Right now she's in a show called Big Fish which is based off of the movie and is a really sweet, funny musical. The performances are February 6 – 9 at Homestead High School and are enjoyable for all ages. The youth are excited to support her at her shows.

Fun Fact: Pteronophobia is the fear of being tickled by feathers.

Mission Outreach Update

Thank You For MUMC's Most Successful Mission Outreach Dinner and Auction

The Mission Outreach Team thanks everyone who attended and/or supported the 35th Annual Mission Outreach Dinner and Auction held at the Ozaukee Country Club on Saturday, January 25!

Special thanks are extended to donors for the Silent Auction and the Voice Auction. In addition, gratitude to Master of Ceremonies Glen Van Fossen, Auctioneer Ben Gruettner, and all who worked together to provide this fun and worthwhile event.

Gross proceeds of \$22,000 were the result of the evening!!!!

These proceeds will support internal and external recipients near and dear to our hearts, including:

Dominican Republic Missionaries
MUMC Youth Mission Trip
MUMC Betty Wheeler Scholarship Fund
Family Promise
Advocates of Ozaukee County
COPE
Family Sharing of Ozaukee County
Hunger Task Force
Interfaith Caregivers
Kathy's House
Northcott Neighborhood Center
Outreach Community Centers
Pathfinders
Repairers of the Breach
St. Vincent de Paul Meal Site
UMCOR Disaster Relief Funds
United Methodist Children's Services



A very special thank you is extended to Karen Huffman and Irene Sullivan who served as co-chairpersons for the Mission Outreach Team for the past four years.

Much gratitude and appreciation for joining together and Making God's Love Real,
The MUMC Mission Outreach Team (Karen Huffman, Irene Sullivan, Rick Gattoni, Joel

Welcome New Members on February 23



Kevin and Sara Cooper

Kevin and Sara Cooper met in 2010 in Midland, Texas. Sara was a recent graduate of Baylor University and Kevin was on an internship and about to start his senior year at Colorado State University. Kevin graduated in 2011 and took a job in Colorado with Bechtel as a mechanical engineer. Sara moved to Colorado Springs and worked as a paralegal. They got married in 2013 and shortly after, Kevin was transferred to Kentucky. They lived in Kentucky until March 2019, when Kevin accepted a job at kW Mission Critical Engineering in Milwaukee. They have two children, Courtney (4) and Shaun (3). Sara is a stay-at-home mom and actively involved in the kids' schools and the Grafton Education Foundation.

Courtney and Shaun will be baptized on February 16 at MUMC.

The Coopers are looking forward to becoming members of MUMC. They appreciate Pastor Sue's sermons, the wonderful musicians each Sunday (and Ellen for having the time and patience to teach their kids new songs), and how welcoming and kind the members have been to them and their children.

Welcome Kevin and Sara!

Charles and Emily Penner

Charles Penner, 44 years old, grew up in Shorewood, Wisconsin, Civil Engineer by background, currently a fantastic stay-at-home dad to baby Greta.

Emily Penner, 44 years old, grew up in Mequon, Wisconsin (and MUMC), Client Management executive at a Benefits and Health Care Transparency Company

Things we appreciate about MUMC: Our church congregation truly makes everyone feel they're part of a family. There's a genuine effort to get to know you. The church provides many opportunities to get involved – either in groups/activities within the church itself or in the community.



Welcome Charles and Emily!

Diverse Leaders' Group Offers Separation Plan "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation"

Members of a diverse group of bishops and other United Methodist leaders met in Washington, DC and reached an agreement on a proposal that would maintain The United Methodist Church but allow traditionalist congregations to separate into a new denomination. A diverse, 16-member group of United Methodist bishops and other leaders has offered a proposal that would preserve The United Methodist Church while allowing traditionalist-minded congregations to form a new denomination. The separating group would get \$25 million in United Methodist funds and would keep its local church properties.

Details are in a nine-page "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation," released

January 3 along with an FAQ and press release. The proposal — reached with the help of famed mediator Kenneth Feinberg, who worked on the federal September 11th Victim Compensation Fund — requires approval by the 2020 General Conference. Drafting of legislation is still underway for the legislative assembly, which is the only body that speaks for the 13 million global denomination.

But given the broad, influential coalition involved — including bishops from around the global connection and advocacy group leaders often sharply at odds — the potential seems strong that the separation proposal can end or at least greatly reduce the denomination's decades-long struggle over how accepting to be of homosexuality. New York Conference Bishop Thomas Bickerton, part of the group, said the contentious 2019 special called General Conference in St. Louis underscored intensifying divisions and the need for amicable separation. "It became clear that the line in the sand had turned into a canyon," Bickerton said. "The impasse is such that we have come to the realization that we just can't stay that way any longer. This protocol provides a pathway that acknowledges our differences, respects everyone in the process and graciously allows us to continue to live out the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, albeit in different expressions."

The plan looks toward a restructuring of the remaining global United Methodist Church into regions, with flexibility to adapt church policies, including on LGBTQ inclusion. Meanwhile, traditionalists forming a new denomination could continue what they see as Bible-supported restrictions on same-sex marriage and ordination of gay persons as clergy. The traditionalist Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) already has taken steps toward forming a new denomination, such as drafting a book of policies and doctrines. Bickerton and the Rev. Keith Boyette, WCA president, said the negotiating team's assumption is that the new church would emerge out of the WCA. Boyette was part of the group developing the proposal. He said traditionalists have long felt that divisions in The United Methodist Church were irreparable, and that an amicable separation was the best way forward. "I believe this is a fair and equitable solution that puts decades of conflict behind us and gives us a hopeful future," he said.

Also negotiating and signing onto the agreement was Jan Lawrence, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, which has long sought to remove restrictions against LGBTQ participation in the denomination. "As a United Methodist who is LGBTQ, my priority at the table was to make sure we addressed the full participation of LGBTQ people in the life of the church, making sure the answer was not 'ask us again in 2024,'" she said. "The language needs to be removed now. I am pleased that there is opportunity here for that to happen in 2020."

The new proposal would allow other United Methodist churches to form their own denominations, while foreseeing ecumenical agreements and cooperation on some fronts. Representatives of traditionalist, centrist, and progressive advocacy groups joined with a handful of bishops from the U.S., Africa, Europe, and the Philippines to reach the agreement. They promised to support it and no other. "We humbly offer to the delegates of the 2020 General Conference the work which we have accomplished in the hopes that it will help heal the harms and conflicts within the body of Christ and free us to be more effective witnesses to God's Kingdom," said Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone, who last summer began the private talks that led to the proposal.

The group had the help of Feinberg, who oversaw the victims' compensation funds after 9/11 and the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. Feinberg donated his time, as did other lawyers who helped the group. "(Feinberg) has a deep interest in religion and the preservation of the public witness of religion, and this is what intrigued him and enabled him to say 'yes' to us," Bickerton said. "We are extremely indebted." Feinberg called it "an honor and a privilege" to be part of the negotiations. "As a result of weeks of intense, voluntary mediation in Washington — ably assisted by Richard Godfrey and Wendy Bloom of the distinguished Kirkland & Ellis law firm — and with the intense, direct, and ongoing participation of all church representatives, a comprehensive resolution of all issues and principles has been achieved," he said in a statement.

A clear catalyst for the negotiations was the 2019 General Conference, which saw passage of the Traditional Plan reinforcing restrictions on same-sex weddings and ordination of LGBTQ persons — but also igniting passionate, ongoing resistance in the U.S. by full inclusion

supporters. The tougher enforcement provided by the Traditional Plan went into effect Jan. 1, but the new proposal calls for holding “in abeyance” any administrative or judicial processes related to same-sex weddings or ordination of gay clergy. “You cannot stop someone from filing a complaint. Neither can you stop someone from requesting a trial,” Bickerton said. “You can hold a complaint in abeyance. That’s our request.”

Key elements of the group’s proposal include:

- 1) The General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church would provide \$25 million, over four years, “to the traditionalist Methodist denomination established pursuant to this protocol.” The new denomination would give up further claims to United Methodist assets, including those of general boards and agencies.
- 2) GCFA would escrow \$2 million to help other potential new denominations.
- 3) To support communities historically marginalized by racism, GCFA would allocate \$39 million over eight years to strengthen Asian, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander ministries, as well as Africa University. Of that total, \$13 million would come from funds the separating traditionalist denomination chose to forgo.
- 4) After the 2020 General Conference, set for May 5 –15 in Minneapolis, there would be a special General Conference for the remaining denomination. “The protocol also references a plan which calls for a special general conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church. The purpose of the Special Session would be to create regional conferences, remove the current prohibitions against LGBTQ persons, and to repeal the Traditional Plan,” said a press release from the negotiating group.
- 5) A (non-U.S.) central conference would be able to choose with a two-thirds vote to affiliate with a new Methodist denomination. The vote deadline would be December 31, 2021, and if no vote is taken the conference remains in The United Methodist Church.
- 6) An annual conference, whether in a central conference or U.S. jurisdictional conference, also could vote to affiliate with a new Methodist denomination. A vote of 20 percent or more at an annual conference session would be needed to have the disaffiliation vote, and a disaffiliation vote would have to pass by 57 percent. The disaffiliation vote deadline is July 1, 2021.
- 7) The leadership body of a local church considering disaffiliation could determine a threshold of a simple majority or two-thirds for the vote on whether to separate. Decisions about disaffiliation must be made by December 31, 2024.
- 8) A local church affiliating with another Methodist denomination “pursuant to the protocol” would keep its assets and liabilities.
- 9) The pension plans of The United Methodist Church would remain in place for all current clergy and lay employees, even if they affiliate with another Methodist denomination under the protocol.

Though the petition deadline for the 2020 General Conference is months past, church rules allow for special annual conference sessions to consider submitting additional petitions. Bickerton noted that some such sessions are already planned for the weeks ahead. The General Conference Committee on Reference also can allow late petitions. The group behind the new proposal has asked the Council of Bishops to request that the Judicial Council consider the constitutionality of the still-being-developed legislation before the opening session of the 2020 General Conference. The group also wants the Council of Bishops to seek a report from GCFA on the financial impacts of the proposal.

The FAQ accompanying the protocol directly addresses post-separation realities: “The United Methodist Church will be smaller. The church will need to quickly assess the impact of churches leaving and adjust infrastructure and spending accordingly. The long-term solution lies in the broad reform that is needed.” Various plans for dramatically restructuring or breaking up The United Methodist Church are already headed to the 2020 General Conference, and a range of behind-the-scenes talks about the denomination’s future have been underway. Yambasu organized a meeting in Chicago on July 19, 2019, that brought central conference bishops together with five representatives each from the traditionalist, centrist and progressive camps. A smaller group met Aug. 16 –17 at Floris United Methodist Church, in Herndon, Virginia, to start the mediated negotiations that led to this new proposal. The group would expand, mostly with bishops, as the process continued.

Key sessions with Feinberg occurred Oct. 17–18, Nov. 11–12 and Dec. 16 –17 in Washington, DC. Council of Bishops President Kenneth Carter was among the far-flung episcopal leaders who joined in discussions and signed the agreement. So did Yambasu from Africa, Bishop Rudy Juan from the Davao Area in the Philippines, and Bishop Christian Alsted

from the Nordic-Baltic Area in Europe. Boyette and Patricia Miller represented the coalition of traditionalist groups that includes the WCA, Good News, the Institute on Religion & Democracy and the Confessing Movement. Lawrence, Randall Miller, and the Rev. David Meredith were there for Reconciling Ministries Network, Methodist Federation for Social Action and Affirmation, and Meredith is listed in the protocol as a member of the UM Queer Clergy Caucus. The group noted in its FAQ that participants represented themselves and could not speak "for all of any group." After details were announced, both MFSA and the UM Queer Clergy Caucus stated that their groups were not officially represented in the discussions. The Rev. Tom Berlin and the Rev. Junius Dotson represented UMCNext, Mainstream UMC, and Uniting Methodists. Those in the room consulted with "outer circle" advisers, as well as financial experts. "The process was a journey," said Dotson, top executive of Discipleship Ministries. "It was filled with anxious moments. It was filled with moments of hope. I definitely felt the weight of these discussions."

All of those signing the protocol agreed to support the development and implementation of enacting legislation. "The fact that we were able to come together from across the world, from across theological spectrums and define an opportunity to collaborate for the sake of the church we all love is a monumental thing," Bickerton said. He added: "My hope would be that the delegates to the General Conference would be able to employ that same spirit as they undertake their work in Minneapolis."

Please note: Hard copies of this article and future articles are available on the table titled "UM News on General Conference" in the narthex.

16 Signatories to the Protocol

- 1) Bishop Christian Alsted (Nordic-Baltic Episcopal Area)
- 2) Rev. Thomas Berlin (representing UMCNext, Mainstream UMC, Uniting Methodists)
- 3) Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton (New York Episcopal Area)
- 4) Rev. Keith Boyette (representing the Confessing Movement, Good News, Institute on Religion & Democracy, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association)
- 5) Bishop Kenneth Carter (Florida Episcopal Area)
- 6) Rev. Junius Dotson (representing UMCNext, Mainstream UMC, Uniting Methodists)
- 7) Bishop LaTrelle Easterling (Washington Episcopal Area)
- 8) Rev. Egmedio "Jun" Equila, Jr. (Philippines Central Conference)
- 9) Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey (Louisiana Episcopal Area)
- 10) Bishop Rodolfo "Rudy" Juan (Davao Episcopal Area, Philippines)
- 11) Janet Lawrence (representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network)
- 12) Rev. David Meredith (representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network, member of UM Queer Clergy Caucus)
- 13) Patricia Miller (representing the Confessing Movement, Good News, Institute on Religion & Democracy, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association)
- 14) Randall Miller (representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network)
- 15) Bishop Gregory Vaughn Palmer (Ohio West Episcopal Area)
- 16) Bishop John K. Yambasu (Sierra Leone Episcopal Area)

Resistance to Traditional Plan Accelerates

Across the United States, some United Methodist churches kicked off the year with worship services and other events aimed at showing solidarity with LGBTQ Christians. At First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, some 575 people packed the 120-year-old sanctuary — including the balcony — for a special Holy Communion service Jan. 5 that sought to affirm the image of God in all people. "The church itself was just filled with God's spirit," said the congregation's senior pastor, the Rev. David Freeman. "Many people have said, 'This is what the church should look like. This is what worship should feel like.'"

Similar services took place over the weekend at United Methodist churches in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and California, as well as a Fayetteville, Arkansas, service simultaneous to the Little Rock evening worship. The gatherings marked the start of the Resist Harm Movement, a new organized effort to resist the Traditional Plan that took effect January 1 in

the U.S. The new rules, adopted by a 438-384 vote at the special General Conference last year, strengthen longtime bans on “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy and same-sex weddings. “An impetus of Resist Harm was to offer a counter-narrative to what people heard after General Conference,” said Pat Luna, one of the organizers of the effort and a member of the Alabama-West Florida Conference.

The Traditional Plan faced immediate pushback after the February lawmaking assembly in a number of churches and conferences. However, the Resist Harm effort marks a coordinated opposition campaign. In a diverse denomination, where enforcement of LGBTQ restrictions varies, Resist Harm organizers expect acts of resistance to take different forms. In addition to ideas for direct action, the effort’s website offers daily prayers, and education and worship resources. “The movement is designed to let everyone do what they can,” Luna said.

By happenstance, the effort was just getting started when the announcement came of a major new proposal for resolving the denomination’s impasse. The plan — the work of a diverse group of traditionalists, progressives and centrists — provides \$25 million for traditionalists to form their own church group. The proposal also requests holding “in abeyance” any complaints under church law related to same-sex weddings or gay ordination until General Conference delegates determine the church’s future at the next assembly May 5 – 15 in Minneapolis.

Luna called the abeyance a great idea but one that the people behind the proposal have no power to enforce. “It’s more important than ever for us to continue full-speed ahead with Resist Harm,” she said. In some cases, she said, that could mean meeting with bishops. Luna was part of a group of about 60 Alabama-West Florida Conference members who met January 6 with the conference’s Bishop David Graves. The group presented a letter imploring him to offer a moratorium on processing complaints. In their meeting, the bishop’s visitors also testified to the harm they see in the current restrictions around LGBTQ ministry. She said the group acknowledged that Graves is bound by the policies in the denomination’s Book of Discipline, and that many in the Alabama-West Florida Conference support the Traditional Plan. She said Graves was very kind and pastoral with the group. “It was a very personal time of sharing how we aspire to be more than a traditionalist conference,” Luna said.

First United Methodist Church in downtown Dallas held what the Resist Harm site lists as its first event — a December 29 service for the reaffirmation of wedding vows that was open to both opposite- and same-sex couples. About 120 couples participated in the service, said the Rev. Andy C. Stoker, the church’s senior minister. “There were many couples who were appreciative of the collective witness,” he said. “The reception was touching. Clergy from Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist churches were in attendance; some offered toasts, blessings, and letters of support from their congregation.”

Kathy Webb was the main organizer of the service in Little Rock. The lifelong United Methodist is also the first openly LGBTQ person to hold elected office in Arkansas. She was elected to the state legislature in 2006 and, after she reached the state’s term limit, won a seat on Little Rock’s city board in 2014. The Little Rock service, she said, drew many LGBTQ people who haven’t been to church in a while. “One woman told me, with tears in her eyes, it was the first time her gay son had been to church with her in over a year,” she said. “I talked to many who’d been hurt by the church — our church and others.” The service, she said, offered a sense of belonging. “I think the message we sent is that there’s a place for everyone in The United Methodist Church — regardless of what the Traditional Plan says,” she said. “And that we will keep working to make it so officially.”

Halfway across the country, the front of Hollywood United Methodist Church in Los Angeles displays a banner declaring the congregation’s commitment to “Resist Harm.” After worship on January 5, those in attendance gathered on the church’s front steps for a photo showing them each holding signs and posters conveying that message. “About 50% of our membership identifies as LGBTQIA,” said the Rev. Denyse Barnes, the church’s associate pastor who identifies as “queer clergy.” “So it’s a church that has experienced a lot of harm and also done a lot of healing towards creating a beloved community where all are truly welcome.” The church’s display also got some welcome attention from the actor Eric McCormack, best known for playing gay character Will in the sitcom “Will & Grace.” McCormack’s wife, Janet, is a member of the congregation, and he occasionally attends. In a tweet of his wife holding a Resist Harm sign, McCormack wrote: “Not much of a churchgoer,

but I applaud & support the leaders & congregation of my wife's church for standing up for LGBTQ rights in the face of church discrimination."

The Hollywood congregation is in the denomination's Western Jurisdiction, where all five active bishops have promised to provide "a safe harbor" for LGBTQ clergy and same-gender weddings, despite church restrictions. That's not the case in other parts of the country. The Rev. Diane McGehee, pastor of Bering Church in Houston, expects the Traditional Plan to be in force in her conference. Nonetheless, the congregation has found ways to protest the plan that it sees as in line with the Discipline. Starting January 1, Bering Church decided not to refer to itself as United Methodist in any communication until what it sees as discrimination ends. The church also plans to bless all same-sex couples and families on January 12. "I think it's really important that a Methodist clergyperson who is their pastor is willing to affirm their relationships publicly and bless them as we would any married couple," McGehee said.

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Apportionment News

February — God is Love

Outward and Visible Sign of an Inward and Spiritual Grace

The title to this reflection comes to us from one of our Communion litanies. It reminds us that every spiritual experience contains both an inward and an outward manifestation. Echoing the sentiment expressed in the letter of James, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), we are challenged to make sure that our actions speak more loudly than our words. What we do matters as much as what we believe.

Paying apportionments is a decision, made mindfully and intentionally. It is a promise we make to show our love in action. It is an act of solidarity, proclaiming to the world that we are proud to be United Methodist; proud to be connected in a synergistic way that allows us to do much more together than we can do alone.

Paying apportionments in full is rarely easy or simple, but few things of lasting value are easy or simple. Sacrificial and faithful stewardship stretches us and demands a deep level of commitment. We choose to give generously. And we choose to do so freely, because we believe in the power of connectional ministry, blessed by the Holy Spirit, to change the world! In a small village outside Malawi in Africa, a cluster of mud huts with thatched roofs set in various states of decay and disrepair. The male population has been decimated by wars and tribal violence, so it is women, children, and old men who populate the village. A United Methodist bus pulls into the village and women run to meet us, dropping to their knees, taking our hands, and uttering exclamations of praise. Our interpreter says, "They are welcoming you as the people of the 'very good church.' United Methodists bring clean water and medicine and help the victims of land mines. They love you Methodists!"

I wish everyone in the United States had opportunities to see where in the world The United Methodist Church has made and is making a difference. It would do all of us good to hear that we are thought of as "the very good church!" Apportionments make such acclamation possible. And not just in one small village, but in locations all over the world.

As of 2012, the global picture of The United Methodist Church included:

- 133 Annual Conferences
- 66 Episcopal Areas
- 45,434 Local Churches
- 57,189 Clergy Members
- 11,969,051 Professing Members
- 3,047,638 Church School Participants
- 309 Hospitals, Clinics and Health Centers
- 158 Schools, Colleges, Universities and Seminaries
- 300+ Commissioned Missionaries; 500+ Volunteers in Mission (projects)
- 850+ Global Mission Projects
- New faith communities through Mission Partnerships in Cambodia, Cameroon, Central Asia,

Information and statistics from The United Methodist Handbook,
"Let's Go Fishing," 2013.

I John 3:1 – 2, 18 – 24

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Commentary: "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." These words are foundational for the United Methodist practice of funding ministry through apportionments. We don't just talk a good game; we put our money where our mouth — and where our faith — is. Paying apportionments in full is an act of faith. For individuals, we make a commitment to support our local congregation's commitment; as a local church, we make a commitment to support our denomination's commitment. And at every level, in every place and time, we make a commitment to do God's work in the world.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In our daily lives, how do we make our love tangible? What actions do we take that reflect the love we feel?
2. How far does our love extend? Who does God call us to love? How can we express this love?
3. How do we participate in the divine and holy work described in the hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"?
4. What is the evidence we have that Jesus Christ abides in us?



Deadline for SPIRE copy: the 25th of the month prior to publication's edition. Send copy to news@mequonumc.org to be included in the monthly SPIRE or the weekly Sunday bulletins.

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