



# Greater Southwest District

Michigan Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Dwayne Bagley, District Superintendent  
dbagley@michiganumc.org • cell: 269.370.2800

Mandana Nordbrock, Executive Assistant  
mnordbrock@michiganumc.org • office: 269.372.7525

2350 Ring Road North, Suite B • Kalamazoo, MI 49006

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Greetings in the Name of Christ,

To say that this has been a long, strange year doesn't even begin to articulate our shared experience these last several months. Back in February we assumed that the greatest challenge facing The United Methodist Church was discerning a graceful way to deal with the outcomes of the General Conference that was scheduled to happen in May of 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic delayed that event, it seemed to offer an opportunity for breathing room. Unfortunately, much of that oxygen was consumed as the people called United Methodist scrambled to find new ways to form Christian Community when circumstances dictated, and guidelines suggested that we shouldn't meet face-to-face. Church leaders stepped up to do new things and find creative ways of being the church. Instead of Corona Time being downtime, many found themselves working more hours than ever before attempting to address situations that neither Course of Study nor seminary classes prepared them to do. I celebrate all of your efforts to help people keep the faith in this extraordinary time.

In spite of a sometimes selfish push to get back to "normal," whatever that's going to be from now on, recent news suggests that we may have more Corona Time ahead of us than behind us. Because of the great cloud of unknowing that shrouds the best laid plans to reopen businesses, schools and churches, our Church Conference season this fall will be different from what you've grown used to the past several years. We will follow the guidance of the Michigan Conference Bishop and Cabinet and convene each conference as a "**Charge Conference**" this year. Instead of inviting the entire congregation to attend, we will be limiting participation to the members of each church's governing body (church council, governance board, leadership team, administrative board) and whatever retired clergy hold their charge conference membership in that local congregation (as spelled out in ¶246.2 of the *2016 Book of Discipline*). If the pastoral charge is made up of more than one church, the members of the administrative bodies from both churches shall be in attendance.

Instead of meeting with the entire SPRC before the Charge Conference as in previous years, the Chair of the SPRC will be asked to present an evaluation of the pastor at the Charge Conference on behalf of the members of the SPRC. The evaluation will be discussed at the Charge Conference. We will also discuss items in the Church Profile with particular attention to church goals. Other agenda items will be limited to setting the salary of those appointed/assigned to the church, the approval of Lay Servants, Lay Speakers, Certified Lay Ministers and candidates for ministry and the adoption of the Committee on Lay Leadership Development Report on Nominations. The entire agenda should take no longer than one hour.

We will conduct the meetings in settings that allow for wearing of masks and appropriate social distancing. If developments related to COVID-19 warrant additional precautions, we may hold Charge Conferences via ZOOM. Each congregation will be notified if we move their Charge Conference to an online venue. Churches that do not receive notification of such a change should assume that the meeting will be in person.

Please note that this year we will be setting aside the EM360 evaluation process. Instead, we will use the evaluation forms and process provided by the Michigan Conference. We are also asking each church to complete the Profile of the Church. This has not been required the last several years, but we're asking each church to complete one this year. Other reports and forms will need to be completed, but presentation of these reports at Charge Conference is not required. A list of required materials is included with this letter. If you have questions, please feel free to contact the District office.

The circumstances we face require us to move forward in this unusual way in this unusual year. They've also moved our District Leadership Team to postpone the annual District Conference until the first quarter of 2021. Necessary votes, limited to those required for the Greater Southwest District to function, will be conducted through an online platform. Details will be coming later this year.

I pray that this finds you seeking God's grace as you lead your church to begin again and begin anew. I also pray that you will continue to make the most of Corona Time. While it certainly offers challenges, it also offers opportunity. May the Spirit of the Living God move in your midst to empower you to make the most of every opportunity.

God's Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dwayne Bagley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D".

Dwayne Bagley  
District Superintendent, Greater Southwest District

encl: 2020 Charge Conference Schedule  
2020 Charge Conference Forms Checklist