



Greater Southwest District

Michigan Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Grace to You and Peace in the Name of Jesus Christ,

By now many of you are trying to ease back into a schedule of activity that approaches a post-pandemic normal. Others of you have shifted into a routine that seems to mirror pre-pandemic practice. Unfortunately, our Fall Conferences for 2021 will not be among those things in the life of Michigan United Methodists that are getting back to “normal.”

Because of a number of factors including: uncertainty around new variants of COVID-19, low vaccination rates, and Michigan Annual Conference policies related to when to hold in-person gatherings, the Greater Southwest District will convene Fall Conferences as Charge Conferences and these meetings will be held via ZOOM. Like last year, only members of your church leadership need to be present at Charge Conferences. Our agenda will be limited to cover only what is required by the *Book of Discipline*. Unlike last year, I will schedule separate ZOOM meetings with the SPRC in each congregation. Churches that are part of multi-point charges can choose whether they wish to hold joint SPRC meetings with me or, if concerns dictate, schedule these meetings for separate times. Additionally, churches with significant issues or concerns may request an in-person meeting. These special, in-person meetings may be scheduled outside of your Fall Charge Conference.

You should also note that because of continued uncertainties, our Annual District Conference for 2021 will take place virtually. Our Leadership Team is meeting this summer to work through the specifics. At least one of those specifics will include conducting necessary votes, limited to those required for the Greater Southwest District to function, through an online platform again this year.

This is not how I expected to do things during what may be my final year as the District Superintendent of the Greater Southwest District. Corona Time has required us to put our wordy speeches about adaptive leadership into practice. And, while practice has not made anything perfect, it has led us to places where we see that it is possible to do things in ways we never imagined. It has brought us to moments of recognition where we realize that the Church of Jesus Christ is alive even if we see one another only through masked faces. And we have come to know that we can continue to touch lives with God’s love even if we’re required to observe social distancing.

There have been moments these past 15 months when it seemed like I was doing little more than marking time on the road to Zion while waiting to respond to the next church crisis or the next round of questions about when, why, and how congregations could reopen. When that felt like all I could do, I felt entirely undone. What has encouraged me is your faithful work and witness as you’ve responded to God’s call to keep the body of Christ and the souls of the saints together as our regular routines continued to fall apart. Now, as we try to bring things back together and wait for other elements to come together, God’s call remains constant and invites us to be part of what God is doing with the same imperative issued in every place and time: “Follow thou me.” I look forward to taking the next steps with you as we march toward Zion even if time and circumstance dictate that we must mark time along the way.

Stay Grounded in Grace,

Dwayne Bagley
Superintendent, Greater Southwest District