

2023 Annual Conference Reports

from Avon UMC Delegates

2023 Indiana Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

June 7-10, 2023

Annual Conference theme: Praying Forward: No Turning Back.

Focus verse : 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Bishop Trimble presented his Episcopal address "Lord, teach us to pray" in the opening of the session. Retired Elder Bert Kite enacted the role of John Wesley.

Conference Finances:

Indiana conference budget for 2024 was set at \$11,949.58= (General church apportionments(\$4336214) + Indiana conference budget (\$7,613644). 2024 budget was created with planned resources in mind, largely by disaffiliating churches (2.8 million). The budget wasn't cut as several staff and activities dictated by the book of Discipline would be lost. Indiana will pay our portion to the Boy Scout Settlement which is about \$1.5 million before the end of 2023 from the general reserves.

Missional Offering:

Each conference participant was given a book to be distributed to someone in need in their community. Conference offering was going towards Bishop Trimble's \$300,000 challenge to help students at Africa University.

I attended the Lucille Raines Lunch on Thursday: They have been able to collect most of the money needed to replace the elevator- with only \$30,000 left out of a total \$500,000 cost.

I also attended the Missions lunch: Thea Greer, founder of “Possibilities Abound” spoke about opportunities to go and serve some of the most at-risk children in Zambia.

Breakthrough Prayer Initiative:

Rev. Sue Nelson Kibby spoke about this initiative that was adopted by many UMC churches in the spring and will again be promoted during the Dynamite 28-day prayer Experiment in September. The main goal is for all the positional members- council members, board of trustees, choir, every church member to pray for God’s direction, feasting on prayer and believing that the prayer will work. Many examples of Breakthrough Prayer and their results with different churches were reported.

Disaffiliation:

19 discontinued or abandoned church or conference properties were sold for a total of \$5,004,910.

174 churches have disaffiliated from the UMC and complete list will be posted on the website. Branches church from Plainfield, IN was on the list. The motion passed with a 95% vote. Along with the 144 churches that disaffiliated previously, a total of 318 churches have disaffiliated so far, with 675 churches still remaining in the UMC.

Growing Young Initiative:

Jake Mulder, author of “Growing Young” spoke on the topic of – What does the future of your church look like? His team has conducted 1300 interviews among 250 churches, with a high percentage of young people. He reported 6 core commitments:

- a. Keychain leadership (meaningful goals)
- b. Empathize with young people
- c. Take Jesus’s message seriously
- d. Fuel a warm community.
- e. Prioritize young people everywhere
- f. Be the best neighbors.

He encouraged churches to give keys (responsibilities to young people in the church) and to empower them to envision new doors with new keys.

Board of Pensions and Health Benefits:

Motion to increase monthly church contributions for health benefits by 12 % in 2024 passed.

Outdoor Ministries:

Camp Rivervale and Epworth Forest Conference Center are celebrating 100 years of life change in 2023. Each year the number of students attending summer camps and volunteers has decreased.

General Board of Global Ministry:

In 2022, UMCOR responded to 97 disasters and gave \$29.1 million.

Resolutions:

Several resolutions were voted on: the ones on LGBTQ issues are aspirational and nonbinding until the General Conference in 2024 but will be passed on the record as the will of the Indiana Conference.

Resolution 1-Gadlodge: Removal of registration fee to be a voting member of Annual Conference, referred to CF&A. Motion passed by 74 %.

Resolution 2-Lassiat: Resolution was amended to ask all lay and clergy members who intend to disaffiliate from the UMC to recuse themselves from participating in any voting capacity in all areas of the church. Motion passed by 77 %.

Resolution 3-Williams: Motion to protect clergy and families dealing with harassment, threats or stalking because of their ministry, was referred to the cabinet to draft a comprehensive policy. Motion passed by 96%.

Resolution 4-Hidalgo(Amended): Implores annual conference to hold a moratorium on any complaints against clergy regarding their sexual orientation or the officiating of weddings of LGBTQIA+ persons. Motion passed by 69%.

Resolution 5-INUMC Cabinet: Aimed at preventing retirees from maintaining their conference relationship and any associated benefits such as health insurance subsidy and death benefit if they pastor/serve in a disaffiliated church. All retirees were to be

given a letter of instruction by Bishop Trimble and this rule would go into effect on July 1, 2024.

Resolution 6-Jacobson: Called Indiana UMC to support change in discipline around same sex marriage and ordination. Resolution passed with a vote of 66%.

Resolution 7-Priddy: Supporting a regional USA conference through the Christmas Covenant- to adapt the Book of Discipline to meet the unique missional needs of each region. Resolution passed with a vote of 74%.

The conference also passed a couple of motions aimed at unseating conservatives elected for General Conference from the delegation. Several requests were made for a special Indiana conference to give churches that needed more time to be able to disaffiliate before the end of this year. Bishop Trimble declined, saying the next opportunity would come at General Conference in April 2024.

1 Clergy and 6 lay Delegates were elected to go to the General conference (the need arising because of disaffiliating churches).

2024 Annual Conference will be June 6, 7, and 8 at St. Luke's UMC in Indianapolis.

Submitted by:

Dipti Shields

Lay Delegate to Indiana Annual Conference

Avon UMC

2023 Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

June 7-10, 2023, Ball State University

Conference theme:

Praying forward No turning back

1Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

3 major initiatives:

Ending Gun Violence: Participants were asked to wear or display orange on Thursday to raise awareness and support efforts to end Gun violence. On Saturday a motion from the floor was brought forward saying that Indiana United Methodists have not done enough and to hold a special offering to support efforts for gun Legislation in Indiana. The motion passed 55-45.

Growing Young: A study Conducted by Fuller Seminary on how to grow a congregation by engaging younger people. Highlighted were 6 core commitments (keychain leadership, empathize with young people, take Jesus’ message seriously, fuel a warm community, prioritize young people everywhere, be the best neighbors) that can help do just that.

Breakthrough Prayer: A innovative prayer program for all churches. 2 main takeaways; while prayer is a two-way conversation with God, often we do all the talking and don’t take time to listen what God is telling us. The second is to develop a congregational prayer, that is printed on a small business style card for each member to pray at an appointed time each day. A 28-day program for all churches in the conference is being planned for all the churches in the conference in September.

Conference Finances: The Conference Budget for 2024 is \$11,555,444. A flat increase from 2023. Because for the paid-up tithes from the disaffiliated churches through 2024 the conference should be able to maintain its staff and ministries. However, the 2025 budget is being reviewed for an expected decrease. Currently Indiana Churches tithe to the conference at 6.5% tithe rate and the conference is hoping to improve on that rate going forward to offset expected future shortfalls. The budget was approved 74-26%

Resolutions:

At every Annual Conference several resolutions are proposed regarding United Methodist goals, doctrine and rules and regulations. Rather than breakdown each one I have grouped the most impactful ones together when possible:

Conflict of Interest:

R-2 Lassiat Resolution. This resolution regarded those who do not intend to remain in the United Methodist Church to remove themselves from voting positions in the church including local, District and conference. This resolution passed 72% to 28%.

R-5 INUMC Cabinet Resolution, that would prohibit mainly retired pastors from participation in Non-United Methodist churches without permission from the Bishop. Those that choose so are asked to withdraw their membership from the conference. This was amended to go into effect July 1, 2024, after a letter from Bishop Julius Trimble explaining this new rule.

LBGTQIA+ Resolutions

R-4 Hidalgo Resolution, Supports a moratorium on enforcing penalties currently in the United Methodist Book of Discipline regarding LBGTQIA+ weddings or clergy until possible changes to the Book Of discipline at the General Conference in April 2024. This resolution passed 69-31%.

R-6 Jacobson Resolution: Supports striking all references to definition of marriages and any reference to Homosexuality in the Book of discipline. There was some question if this is the duty of the elected delegates to the General Council, not of the Indiana Annual Conference. This passed 66-34%

Bishop Trimble stated that these resolutions were aspirational and therefore non-binding but would be passed on to the Delegates as a statement of the will of the Indiana Conference.

One other Resolution: R-7 Priddy Resolution. This resolution supports the creation of a new Region for the United States. This would allow the Book of Discipline to have some differences between regions that account for societal and historical differences. Passed 74-26%

Disaffiliations: The Conference approved 174 churches disaffiliation request 95%-5%, that brings the total number to 318, leaving 675 Churches in the Indiana Conference. There was a request to have an additional Annual Conference in November, but the Bishop stated that the United Methodist General Conference in April 2024.

I am available for questions regarding any of these issues and will get back to anyone who would like further information.

Submitted with prayerful consideration,

Dave Hoffmeyer

Lay Delegate to Indiana Annual Conference

Avon United Methodist Church

2023 Annual Conference Equalization Member Report:

Bishop Julius Trimble lead our conference at our Annual Conference in Muncie (over 3 days June 8-10), with the theme of “Praying Forward, No Turning Back”, based on scripture of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ~ Rejoice always, pray continually, give thank in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

May I get an Amen?

In addition to the business that I will summarize, we also heard great worship messages, testimonies and music. Many times I felt moved to tears.

Over 3 days, the delegates around Indiana UMCs heard reports and resolutions and took voting actions toward the business of the church. Regular business was conducted of hearing about our Finances, approved the 2024 budget (at same level as 2023), hearing from our Trustees, hearing from the Board of Pension and Health Benefits, as well as committees on “Children Matter Most”, Emerging Leaders (our young people), Mission and Connectional Ministry, to name a few.

There were elections for Indiana delegates to General Conference (1 clergy, 6 lay) to replace those who have had to withdraw (I believe due to disaffiliating).

There were also aspirational resolutions adopted, not prescriptive. They were on integrity of clergy/lay to UMC, against gun violence, and being open to all. All resolutions are online, but some were amended.

The business also included approving disaffiliations throughout the State of @179 churches, 10 are in our central district.

Out of the disaffiliations, revenue will be coming to UMC in the millions, to fund retirement and benefits of retired pastors, and other expenses of our Church Conference.

But don’t be alarmed, ministry and missions continue in our Indiana UMC Conference. There were presentations from many Committees and teaching moments. The ones that struck me were the power of “Break Through Prayer Initiative” and the “Growing Young”. Both those initiatives/presentations are realistic for our Church (we the people) to accomplish in the coming years.

Additionally there was a Celebration of Life worship service and Celebration of Ministry, Commissioning and Ordination Service.

Here at Avon, we are charged by our Annual Conference with establishing “what is our dream?”

There are 4 million unchurched people in Indiana. 6 out of 10 households are unchurched. We were encouraged to take the church to them, by meeting them in ours and their places of work, school, homes, and play. The Conference has a coaching available to help if we need it through the Church Development Committee.

How do we change our culture? LISTEN, SUPPORT WHAT YOUNG ONES CREATE, EXPERIMENT; it will take the young, old and everyone in between to support and encourage one another.

So the message of this 2023 Annual Conference is to “Create your Joy” in Jesus, rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstance for this is God’s will. Thanks be to God.

Be encouraged

Submitted by:

Suzanne Conger

Equalization Member to Indiana Annual Conference

Avon United Methodist Church