

JUNE 13, 2019

# NARDIN PARK NEWS

## SPECIAL EDITION



The Michigan Annual Conference was held May 30th through June 2nd at the Grand Traverse Resort in Acme, Michigan (just outside of Traverse City). This gathering included nearly 2,000 United Methodists from nearly 800 churches around Michigan. Nardin Park was represented by 17 people, 11 of whom had voice and vote.

Lay delegates from Nardin Park included: Mike Marks, Mike Kain, John and Nancy Gingrich and Mary Glenn

Clergy delegates included: Melanie Carey, Beth Titus, George Covintree and Lynn Hasley—Wes Brun and Karen Poole were not able to attend conference this year. In addition Andy Wayne and Bea Alghali were lay equalization members with voice and vote.

The following persons visited the conference, but did not have voice or vote: Tom Russell, Gary Hasley, Rachel Kain and Kyle Webber—Kyle served as the conference choir director and Rachel and Gary sang in the conference choir along with Andy Wayne.

In this special edition of the Nardin Park Newsletter you will hear from some of our voting delegates and visitors with their thoughts and impressions about annual conference. In terms of the actions taken at the annual conference here is a wrap up from the [Michiganumc.org](http://Michiganumc.org) website:

“In a series of votes taken June 1st on matters related to the 2019 and 2020 General Conferences, the Michigan Annual Conference expressed aspirations for greater inclusion of LGBTQ persons. Three times, clergy and laity members voted on measures that would provide Bishop David Bard and conference leadership with aspirations for greater inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the Michigan Conference. In addition to the ordination of nine persons, nine Elders and two Deacons were commissioned. Of those commissioned, two are openly gay persons.”

This is annual conference season across the United States and as of this writing we are about half way through the 57 annual conference meetings. So far we are seeing similar results to the Michigan Conference across the country, not everywhere, but in many US conferences there is an aspiration for greater inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life of the UMC. Of course, not all United Methodists are of one mind on this matter. Some believe, as do 31 percent of Michigan Annual Conference delegates, that the traditional plan passed at General Conference 2019 is the church they would like to see.

What does this mean for our future? We are still finding our way forward, but I anticipate that there will be several Methodist expressions in the future. Hopefully we will have some ties to one another, but also we will allow each expression to live out the different theological beliefs held by the members. This space between us will allow for us to stop arguing about who is right and wrong and stop doing harm, especially to the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized communities.

It is still not clear yet, what the varied Methodist options are going to be, but these options are beginning to emerge and Nardin Park Church will continue to talk about what we believe and we will continue to be a church where everyone (and we mean everyone!) is welcomed, loved and supported fully, including those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Pastor Melanie



## Here at Nardin Park: What are we doing in response to General Conference 2019?

Many people at Nardin Park want to make sure that our congregation is welcoming and inclusive to all people. The Reconciling Ministries Team is working to make sure all people know they are welcome here and also to help people of the congregation have conversations and be informed about where we might be headed as a congregation. We are following a process that may lead us to be a Reconciling Ministries Network Church (RMN). Doing so means that we have a commitment to being in loving Christian ministry with all people without prejudice, to truly have "open hearts, open minds, open doors," to work toward a time when our congregation, our denomination, our society live the all-inclusive love that our faith asks of us.

To help people be informed, and to understand each other, and to make sure each person has an opportunity to be heard, the Reconciling Ministries Team is planning 3 "Holy Conversations" this summer. Each one will have some presentations and conversations around tables.

1. **Sunday, June 30 11:30-1:00** a salad lunch and child care will be available

We will hear people's stories and ask ourselves, when have we felt excluded or unwelcome?

2. **Sunday, July 28 11:30-1:00** lunch and child care will be available

Where is the United Methodist Church headed and what that does that mean for local congregations?

3. **Sunday, August 25 11:30-1:00** lunch and child care will be available

What does it mean for us if we become a Reconciling Ministries Congregation and what does it require of our congregation?

Please plan to join us for a time of Holy Conferencing around an important matter in the church.

**The Mission of the Reconciling Ministries Network is:**

Living into our shared baptismal covenant, Reconciling Ministries Network equips and mobilizes United Methodists to resist evil, injustice, and oppression as we seek justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

## A few words from voting and visiting Delegates...

We have each attended Annual Conference about 6 times, and are always uplifted by the worship services, with their powerful sermons and enthusiastic group singing!

The plenary voting sessions were made more efficient this year by using individual electronic devices instead of manually counting upheld yellow voting-placards.

A straw poll was taken regarding LGBTQ inclusion issues: 2/3 of the votes cast were for open inclusion of LGBTQ's re; membership, clergy, and marriage ceremonies, and 1/3 were opposed.

Before the conference, several churches had individually taken straw polls, with similar results. Consequently, we wondered if Nardin Park would or would not benefit from taking such a straw poll of our own congregation. It would take a considerable effort to reach out to everyone, while at the same time keeping the voting anonymous. It would also tell us how we align with the conference delegates.

Finally, during a late-night Q&A session, Bishop Bard once again expressed his opinion that "more space" is needed between these opposing factions. To quote the Bishop from his April 29, 2019 pastoral letter: "This might include amicable separation, a new connectionalism, new Methodisms, a new form of unity, mutual blessing and sending."

This leaves Nardin Park with much to think about.

John & Nancy Gingrich

The 2019 Session of the Michigan Annual Conference convened on Thursday, May 30, 2019 in Traverse City, MI at the Grand Traverse Resort. Some people question why we go there but it is one of the few venues in Michigan that can accommodate our group. One thousand nine hundred and sixty clergy and laity were registered. There were also spouses, guests, and others in attendance.

My favorite part of Conference is the worship experience. Music is always inspiring and this year, the conference choir was led by our own Director of Music Ministries, Kyle Webber. The sound of over 2000 voices singing and praising God was truly uplifting. Building on the Conference theme of Bold and Effective Leaders, our speakers encouraged us to show wisdom, courage and heart. After the outcome of General Conference 2019, I was concerned about how those decisions would affect our conference gathering. As delegates, we were able to discuss sensitive topics with respect and vote on difficult legislation. We elected delegates to the 2020 General Conference, Jurisdictional Conference and, alternates. We used electronic voting devices for the first time and the voting went smoothly.

I left the conference with a feeling of hope for the future of our church. The family dynamics may change but our mission will remain the same. We are to go forth and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and that includes everyone!!

Thank you for the privilege of being one of your delegates.

Mary Glenn

The Michigan Annual Conference of 2019 was the best United Methodist annual conference in which I've ever participated. I'm not exaggerating. Why, you say? Because I have hope again for the future of the people called Methodist, especially those of us here in Michigan and several other annual conferences who are resisting the efforts of religious fundamentalists who are almost completely positioned to take over our global denomination. Since the General Conferences in 2016 and 2019, many of us thought the future of the denomination is bleak as it is now constructed. We have been through several Methodist schisms in the past in American history and we have operated under various names; "United Methodist" is only the most recent name since 1968. We might be sailing into the turbulence of another schism, which has been churning since 1972, nearly 50 years. When I came out as gay and left the ordained ministry of the UMC in 1990, I had no idea it would take this long to reach a point where the denomination would have to make major decisions to resolve the crisis in Methodism.

The most recent annual conference in Traverse City was not only brilliantly organized and executed (worship, business & teaching sessions, meals, etc.) in a beautiful location, but also energizing and uplifting for many of us because of several key votes which shine a light on the thinking of our denomination within Michigan and how we might move into the future. The first vote by a 70% majority was in the clergy session to ordain and commission multiple people determined to be called and ready by the Board of Ordained Ministry, including two persons who are openly gay. The second noteworthy vote is a statement of aspiration, which says, in part, that "The Michigan Annual Conference aspires to live into an expression of Methodism that includes LGBTQIA people in full life and membership of the UMC." That passed 68% to 32%. We don't want any more church trials and investigations based on sexual orientation. Third, was a non-binding straw poll to discern the will of the Annual Conference on this issue. As reported by an annual conference article, "The result of the straw poll indicated a two-thirds preference (69% - 789 votes) for "a United Methodist Conference who policies allow for but do not require clergy to officiate at same-sex weddings, allow for consideration for ordained ministry of persons regardless of sexual orientation, and in which appointments are made with consideration given to the full range of contextual realities." I encourage members to read the full texts (below) of both the aspirational statement and the straw poll.

<https://michiganumc.org/news-stories/2019/06/04/michigan-conference-greater-inclusion/>

Building for the future, we are not waiting passively for the future to happen to us. We will resist evil, injustice, and oppression and build a progressive, inclusive future together working toward the Kingdom of God. As co-creators with the Divine, we are creating the future we envision for Methodism in Michigan, aligning ourselves with other Methodists who will work with us as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thomas S. Russell

This was my 20th annual conference. For many years I have been a lay "bureaucrat," serving in the government of the church. And annual conference is always a highlight of the year for me. It's like a giant family reunion, where we all get together for four days of worship and fellowship. We laugh with each other, cry with each other, celebrate with each other, and yes, struggle with each other.

This year was tenser and more emotional than most. The fate of our denomination is up in the air. As a church, we don't know where we'll be in a few years, what things will look like, or whether we'll even be together. The issue, of course, is whether the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. And this issue felt omnipresent, with a straw poll highlighting the stark divide as people caucused and strategized as to how to keep their own friends from being elected to the General/Jurisdictional Conference delegation.

Yet, the Spirit was still there, moving among us through our struggles. And at no time was this clearer than at the ordination service, always a high point in the life of the church. It was awe-inspiring to watch the processional – all the clergy of the conference, the ordinands, the Cabinet, and finally, the Bishop with his crozier. As the organist played the prelude, I stood with the acolytes just outside the center doors, waiting to send them in to start the service. As I stood there, I looked back down the hallway at the long lines of clergy who have dedicated their lives to Christ and his church, and I thought about all the lay people who serve so faithfully in their home congregations. And I thought to myself, "Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place."

Andy Wayne

## Reflections from Nardin Park Clergy...

### **Annual Conference Reflection**

**Invigorating. Inspiring. Inclusive.**

Like many I headed to Annual Conference with mixed emotions. I had some fear that the discussion and debates would end up being hurtful, yet I was excited to see if we, as a church, were going to be able to find our way forward through the frustration of General Conference 2019 decisions and the sweeping movement across Michigan and the United States to be an inclusive church. I also had some doubt about our effectiveness as a denomination if we were unable to make decisions about the future.

Honestly, I was so surprised by the excitement that people brought, by the organization of groups to get work done, and by the welcome that embraced people as they arrived. I found conference for the first time in a long time to be invigorating rather than draining, to be inspiring rather than boring, and to be more inclusive than ever before. The theme of Annual Conference was Bold and Effective Leadership. Wisdom. Courage. Heart. And we had some incredible preachers and speakers on this topic.

As a youth pastor, I was especially motivated by the 2 teaching sessions that were held in the morning on Friday and Saturday. The 2 women who spoke to us in these teaching sessions are both pastor's kids (PK) and both credit their experiences in and with the church for the skills they need to be the incredible women they are.

Becca Farnum is an environmental peace-building educator working with communities to "love kindness and do justice" through conflict resolution. Although she spoke at an incredible speed, her thoughts about being a youth in the UMC should encourage all churches to make room for their youth to lead and grow and fly. As a teenager, Becca was a delegate to General Conference and was active in the Wesley Campus Ministries both as Central University and Michigan State. Her first international trip was to Haiti on a mission trip--which inspired her to experience more international service. She later attended the first Global Young People's Conference and Legislative Assembly in South Africa.

Experiences with the worldwide United Methodist Church increased Becca's passion for global justice, vulnerable communities, and the environment. Mentors in the Michigan Conference guided her toward the goal of her professional life: To help people build the skills they need to transform society, so they can be makers - rather than victims - of global change. She has worked all over the world including the Middle East and Africa. Now in her mid 20's, she has a PhD in Geography and teaches environmental justice and global justice at the Syracuse University London. Kristen Grauer is a Foreign Service Officer at the U.S. Department of State. She has served abroad 14 out of the last 17 years, completing tours in Benin, Russia, Liberia, Iraq, France, and Cote d'Ivoire. She has worked on everything from truth and reconciliation commissions in post conflict countries, to maritime pollution, to visa and refugee processing, to helping U.S. businesses expand abroad. She is most proud of her work on small scale development projects like schools, wells, and orphanages in Africa that made an immediate difference in communities. Kristen is a proud Michigan UMC PK (daughter of the late Rev. Charles D. Grauer) who credits much of the resilience she needs for her day job to her childhood in the church. Habitat for Humanity, youth group, CROP walks, countless summers at UMC camps, and a stint in Poland as a UM Volunteer in Mission all helped foster a sense of purpose and compassion that keeps Kristen going through even the most stressful of tours. She says, "You, the church, taught me this. Commit to a cause bigger than yourself. Find your moral compass. Care for others. Challenge convention. In other words, 'Let your little light shine.'"

These speakers encouraged me to keep challenging our youth to go on mission trips, be leaders in our congregation, volunteer for local mission and outreach work. Someday, it will be a foundation that takes them far.

In the new reality of the UMC, as we talk about a way forward, as we consider the way we can live out our conscience in the church, I find myself challenged to speak up and take a stand more than I ever have before. To me the idea of not being fully inclusive seems to be not what Jesus would do. As I continue to serve and follow Christ who compels us to more than anything "love our neighbors," I feel the need to include all in the life of the church. At Annual Conference I was inspired to join the Michigan Methodist Federation for Social Justice. I attended meetings to organize the electing delegates for General Conference 2020, and did my part to make it happen--which it did. I was encouraged by Bishop Bard who has clearly stated his intentions to be with those of us who are working for some form of Methodism that will include LGBTQIA persons. I was excited about voting to commission 2 young gay and lesbian persons for ministry in the church. Although I find it hard to think about the church needing to become something different, I also celebrate that the future looks new and full of possibility for the first time in a long time in my mind.

- Pastor Beth Titus

## Third place. Who woulda' thunk it?

For the past several years now, Annual Conference kicks off with a Golf Scramble and a 5K Run. The Golf Scramble is a fundraiser for our Campus Ministries and the 5K Run is a fundraiser for UMCOR/Disaster Relief. This year I decided to run (walk) the 5K with about 50 others. The course takes you around the grounds and golf course of the Traverse Bay Resort. Up hill and down. It was fun to talk with old friends and colleagues as I walked my way back to the starting gate. After the race awards are handed out (of course the real winners are the folks we help through UMCOR). Surprise, surprise! I found out that in the 59 and over category, I had trotted in third place! It took the rest of conference for my knees to recover!

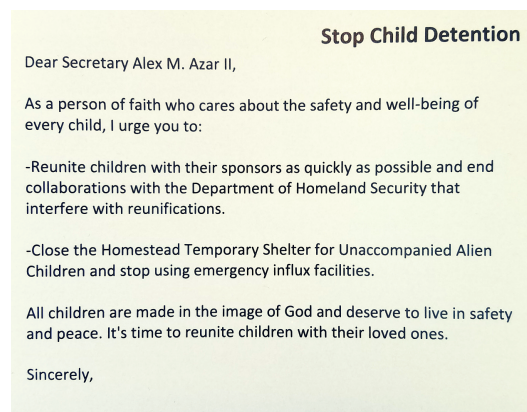
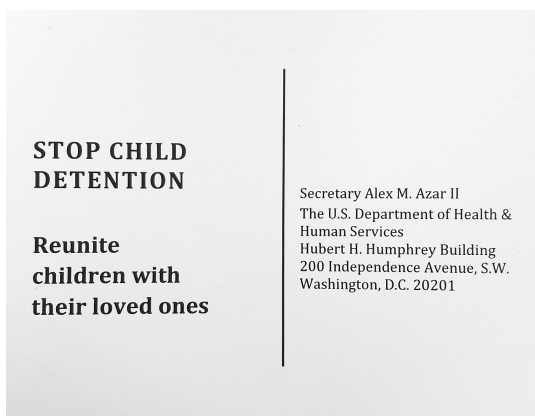
So began an historic conference. Aside from electing our youngest delegation to represent us at the 2020 General Conference (the majority of whom are women, a quarter of the 20 delegates are people of color and a fifth are young adults), we, as a conference, passed legislation brought forward by the Conference Board of Justice to support efforts to break down the barriers that keep individuals returning from incarceration from getting professional and trade licenses. We approved having our congregations contact our governmental leaders to stop child detention at our borders and work to reunite these children with their loved ones. (Post cards (seen below) are available to send to the Secretary of Health and Human Services).

Annual Conference also approved a resolution to be sent to General Conference 2020. It calls for the creation of a Central Conference in North America. My feeling about this resolution is that it levels the playing field and would make all of our General Conference bodies equal. No longer would the North American church be the norm, the standard to which all others are held too. We, like our brothers and sisters in Africa, the Phillipines, Europe, would have the ability to adapt our structure to be flexible and contextually relevant. It was approved by a vote of 705-336 and will be sent on to General Conference.

It was an historic conference. We did a lot of work. We ran (walked) well. Third place?!!

-Pastor George

### Postcard



For more information:

<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/immigration/familydetention>

## My Perspectives on Annual Conference 2019

The Michigan Annual Conference 2019 felt different than previous annual conferences. There are huge changes happening in the United Methodist Church, and no one was quite sure how they would play out here in our own state. Would we adhere to the Traditionalist Plan adopted a few months before at General Conference, or would we stand up for those who were unjustly being treated as a second class of members – welcome, but unable to marry in their own church and unable to respond to a call from God be ordained for ministry?

At the clergy session, there was a strong majority of the voting clergy who decided to support the action of our Michigan Board of Ordained Ministry in adopting a policy that refuses to discriminate, but rather clearly states our intention to recommend candidates for ordination based only upon relevant qualifications.

During two later votes by the entire delegation of both clergy and laity, once again a large majority of Michigan Methodists voted to make it clear that we want to be a conference that welcomes all LGBTQIA persons into the full life of the church, not as second class members.

At the ordination service on the final day of Annual Conference, we witnessed a groundswell of joy as two openly gay persons were commissioned for ministry, the last major step before ordination. This had never happened before! As we all sang Halle, Hallelujah after the commissioning, people spontaneously rose to their feet, clapping with joy!

Things are changing in the Michigan United Methodist Church. We don't yet know exactly how all this will play out, but my heart is filled with joy as I see the church that I love mirroring the spirit and actions of the Savior who is at the heart of our faith! Thanks be to God!

By Rev. Lynn Hasley



### Looking for more information?

Michigan Annual Conference  
<https://2019.michiganumc.org/>

Michigan United Methodist Church  
<https://michiganumc.org/>

Michigan Statement of Aspiration  
<https://michiganumc.org/news-stories/2019/06/04/michigan-conference-greater-inclusion/>

Reconciling Ministries Network  
<https://rmnetwork.org/>

