

Michigan Annual Conference was held on Thursday, June 1 – Sunday June 4, 2023 at Grand Traverse Resort.

This year's theme was "New Every Morning". This theme "invites us to reflect, remember, and give thanks for all that ways that God's love and mercies have been at work in our churches, district, conference, and denomination throughout these anxious and uncertain times. No matter where we have been traveling this season as Michigan United Methodists, God has been with us, God's love has sustained us, and God's mercies have been flowing through our members and ministries. As always, God's grace is at work in and through us."(<https://2023.michiganumc.org>)

I want to share a summarized version of Bishop Bard's sermon from Friday's opening:

We've faced tough times, walking challenging paths. As we recover from COVID-19, we're still assessing its impact on our churches. And also, At the conference, we'll vote on churches leaving our conference and The United Methodist Church. This brings mixed emotions, so let's be kind and offer grace. Many have been exhausted and hurt by this process, including bishops and district superintendents. It has also affected conference staff, pastors, leaders, and members.

We should also be concerned about the broader trend of religious disaffiliation in our country. The rate of switching away from Christianity has been increasing since the 1990s. Projections suggest Christians could be less than 50% of the U.S. population by 2070.

These changes impact our budget and staffing. The proposed budget includes significant reductions, leading to staff restructuring and fewer districts. It hasn't been easy, causing pain and disappointment.

Jesus still walks with us

Jesus walks with us in our difficult journey. He doesn't abandon us when we're weary, lonely, confused, grieving, or hurting. Jesus joins us on the road, whispering in our hearts. As the morning breaks and the shadows fade, we experience His love, a pure and universal love.

With Jesus by our side, our hearts are set ablaze. His presence reignites our passion for mission, ministry, evangelism, and caring for those in need. His presence reignites our passion for justice and building a beloved community. His presence reignites our passion for life, love, and beauty. Even on our hardest days, Jesus whispers, "It's okay," and helps us take one step at a time. Eventually, our steps become quicker, filled with confidence, and even dance-worthy, as our hearts continue to burn with His love.

God's love renews every morning

Despite the struggles within The United Methodist Church, we believe that God is not done with us yet. His love renews every morning. Even in our brokenness, we trust that God is still working in us and through us. He calls us to be part of His transformative work. In our divided world, God builds bridges and creates beloved community. Despite the challenges, His love remains constant. In a violent world, we are called to be peacemakers, doing justice and showing mercy.

God's love empowers us to make a difference. Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church, Let's get to join that work, because new every morning is God's love.