



July 2017

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am happy to report to you that I have survived another Wisconsin United Methodist Annual Conference. I not only survived, but I actually enjoyed it (for the most part). A definite highlight of the conference was having the opportunity to hear teaching from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Adam Hamilton is the founding pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, the largest United Methodist church in the nation, with an average weekend worship attendance of 11,000 on multiple campuses. During his Saturday sessions, Rev. Hamilton shared tips for improving worship that he has learned over the years of leading worship every week at Church of the Resurrection. He talked about intentional discipleship and asked, "What is a disciple? What does one look like?" He said every church should have a clear picture of discipleship, and define goals to help them reach people in any stage of their faith journey. Rev. Hamilton chastised the clergy a bit by saying the purpose of worship is to help people have a spiritual encounter with God, but most people don't expect it because it doesn't happen very often. He then walked through the beginning of a worship service at Church of the Resurrection, and identified some of the ways their worship services help people encounter God. Finally, he talked about how Church of the Resurrection intentionally reaches out to new people. "Greet people in the parking lot," he said. "How is your signage? Do you have a good website? What does your nursery look like?" He added, "Is your church intentionally reaching out to people who are lost sheep?" In the end, he said the key is to focus on loving and welcoming everyone who walks in the door. "People don't become Christians because of our superior theological arguments," he said. "They become Christians because we love them. "

A large part of the conference is taken up by reports from various boards and agencies of the UM conference and voting on proposed legislation and resolutions. We voted to approve five changes to the denomination's constitution, which was legislation passed down from the General conference of 2016. One action item I was glad that was not considered by the conference was a resolution, proposed by the conference board of Church and Society, that would have made official the Wisconsin conference's approval of the position statement put forth by the board of ordained ministry back in November. That statement included the position that the WI Board of Ordained Ministry would not abide by the section of our *Discipline* that states self-avowed, practicing homosexuals will not be approved for licensed or ordained ministry. Thankfully, the Bishop did not allow this resolution to go to the floor of the conference by stating it was out of order, and should not be considered by the conference, because it was against our official doctrine and *Discipline*.

The weekend closed with the annual commissioning and ordination worship service. I am proud that several friends of mine were ordained this year and a few folks were commissioned as provisional elders or deacon. I sure hope that I will be one of those folks being ordained as an elder in full connection next year. I now begin my preparation to go before the Board of Ordained Ministry myself in February of 2018. Please keep me in prayer as I write my papers, fill out all the forms, and prepare my mind, heart and spirit for this daunting undertaking.

Overall, this was a very good annual conference. The atmosphere seemed much more collegial than in years past; people were respectful of one another and there were no signs of defiance or protesting. I think everyone present is aware of the unique, if not precarious, situation the UMC is in right now, and are waiting patiently for the denomination's Commission on a Way Forward to complete its work and for its proposed legislation on the future UM church structure to be considered at the special called General Conference in February 2019.

I want to thank Jerry Bower of Trinity church and Fred and Kate Dillon of Peace church for serving as our lay delegates to annual conference this year. It is a big commitment to serve in this way, representing our local congregations in the work and ministry of the larger church of Wisconsin. Please take time to thank them as well.

God bless and look forward to seeing you in worship.

Rev. Wiley Gladney