



Grace Note:

Report of the Pastor's Advisory Team, May 1, 2021

The Pastor's Advisory Team (PAT) has been active during the pandemic, and has met via Zoom three times in the past year to keep abreast of denominational activities. What would we be doing during the pandemic if it wasn't for Zoom?

Happenings at the denominational level:

- General Conference has been postponed again, due to the pandemic, until late August, 2022. (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/general-conference-postponed-until-2022>) There are hundreds of international delegates to General Conference, and travel restrictions are still uncertain for summer/fall, 2021 for international travel. This means that important work of the denomination, such as the election of bishops at Jurisdictional Conferences cannot be held. This affects our local Annual Conference directly, because our bishop has retired, and we are currently being supported by an interim bishop. Of course, it also means that the denomination continues to operate with uncertainty about the future of the United Methodist Church, as it struggles to agree/disagree on the full inclusion of our LGBTQIA+ siblings.
- Some groups of churches and even Annual Conferences, have announced plans to leave the United Methodist Church regardless of what happens at the anticipated 2022 General Conference. This includes the creation of two new, separate expressions of Methodism: The Global Methodist Church (GMC) (<https://www.globalmethodist.org/>), and the Liberation Methodist Connexion (LMX) (<https://www.thelmx.org/>). Both groups have indicated their intention to leave the United Methodist Church, regardless of what happens at the 2022 General Conference.
- You may have heard that the [Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation](#), a proposal developed through mediation in January, 2020, is still very much in play for the 2022 General Conference. It details how churches, pastors, and Annual Conferences can leave the denomination, and what the financial impact to those entities, and the UMC denomination, would be. The Protocol would allow the creation of other Methodist expressions, most likely the GMC and LMX, with remaining churches retaining the UMC title and structure. It does allow churches or annual conferences to leave the denomination and join any other church/denomination, new or existing. It would not have to be one of these three. It is rumored, however, that while General Conference has been postponed support for the Protocol may be declining.

At the Jurisdictional Conference level, there has not been any official action, because the current UMC Constitution allows for Jurisdictional Conference meetings only after General Conference has occurred.

At the Annual Conference level:

- At the 2020 Annual Conference, the decision was made to reduce the six districts in Northern Illinois to five. Those changes will be effective on July 1, 2021 (<https://www.umcnic.org/news/bishop-sets-new-district-boundaries>) . FUMC Evanston has been in the Chicago Northwest District, but will now be included in the Lake North District. There is very little geographic change between Chicago Northwest and Lake North, except that some of the far north suburban churches will now be a part of our district. Rev. Brittany Isaac will continue to be our District Superintendent.
- As stated above, Bishop Sally Dyck retired on December 31, 2020. Northern Illinois is now being supported by Bishop John Hopkins, on an interim basis until the next Jurisdictional Conference can meet. At the next Jurisdictional Conference, it is likely that a decision will be made to reduce the number of Annual Conferences in the Jurisdiction, and Northern Illinois, the smallest annual conference geographically, is likely to be affected. It is yet to be determined with which other annual conference we would be combined.
- The Northern Illinois Annual Conference is a Reconciling Conference, the first annual conference ever to declare itself to be so. [This declaration was in 1986](#). In 2019, the Annual Conference voted to hold in abeyance any complaints or charges against pastors who officiate at same-gender weddings or allow same-gender weddings to be conducted on church property, and that the gifts and graces of all persons desiring ordination, regardless of sexual preference or gender expression, be considered. (<https://www.umcnic.org/media/files/Journal/2019%20NIC%20Journal.pdf>, document #700.12, page 120) Any complaints resulting from this stance would be held "in abeyance" until the next General Conference when disagreements about the future of the denomination would be made clear. Annual Conferences do not have the authority to instruct the bishop how to carry out their duties. And while Bishop Dyck was in full support of the Annual Conference's vote, it is not yet clear how Interim Bishop Hopkins will respond.

At the level of First UMC, Evanston:

- In early 2020, prior to the pandemic and discontinuation of in-person worship and meetings, PAT met with Neal Christie, Assistant General Secretary to the General Board of Church and Society, who was responsible for drafting a new edition of the United Methodist Social Principles, the document that first spoke to "the practice of homosexuality is... incompatible to Christian teaching," in 1972. (<https://www.cokesbury.com/book-of-discipline-book-of-resolutions-free-versions>, Book of Discipline, page 113). This new draft removes the offensive language, but cannot be acted upon until General Conference in 2022.
- Also prior to the pandemic, PAT met with Jan Lawrence, Executive Director of the Reconciling Ministries Network, and a participant in the mediated negotiation to develop the Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation. Jan spoke with us about the development of that document and the historical context of the evolving inclusion of those other than white male landowners in the governance of the Methodist movement throughout history. Recently, the Alabama and West Florida Reconciling Ministries Network released a video overview of that history, which can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svWr1yf2c_U.
- PAT met with Lonnie Chafin, Treasurer and Director of Administration for the Northern Illinois Conference, on June 28, 2020. Lonnie is one of the denominational leaders of the former "UM Forward" movement, which

was part of the pre-2019 General Conference centrist efforts to help the denomination re-define itself as embracing all points of view: conservative, progressive and centrist. The former UM Forward group wrote the [“Out of Chaos, Creation” statement](#), which encouraged United Methodists around the world to take the time offered by the pandemic to study, discuss, and consider what we want the Church to look like and act like in the future. The Chaos/Creation authors were not advocating for any decisions or definitive ideas. The intent was to encourage dialogue. Our PAT group was fortunate to be a beta test for the Chaos/Creation study guide.

- On October 25, 2020 PAT met with representatives from Asbury Memorial Church of Savannah, Georgia. Asbury is the first UM church to officially leave the denomination in support of our LGBTQIA+ siblings. While most news stories describe their church as “leaving the denomination,” the members there described it as being “pushed out.” Their annual conference and their bishop are strong supporters of the traditionalist movement within the denomination, while Asbury is reconciling and has many active LGBTQIA+ members and advocates. The Asbury representatives explained the process by which they determined their path forward. And while they consider themselves to be Wesleyan and Methodist historically and theologically, as of September 6, 2020, they are no longer part of the United Methodist denomination. They said that time will tell whether they will join one of the new expressions of Methodism that may come out of the 2022 General Conference.
- On April 17, 2021, PAT was fortunate enough to meet with Rev. Alka Lyall, pastor at Broadway UMC in Chicago. Rev. Lyall is chair of the Northern Illinois Conference delegation to General Conference. Rev. Lyall spoke of the traditionalists’ movement to create the Global Methodist Church, and the liberationist movement to create the Liberation Methodist Connexion. She indicated that it is her belief that if the denomination splits, there will be churches in the Northern Illinois Conference who will join the Liberation Methodist Connexion, and there will be churches who join the Global Methodist Church. Rev. Lyall explained to us the reasons that the status of the NIC as reconciling does not obligate Interim Bishop Hopkins to act in any particular way when faced with a complaint about a pastor’s actions when ministering to our LGBTQIA+ siblings. This resulted in a healthy discussion among PAT members about what could be done.
- Based on the information from Rev. Lyall, PAT decided that we should submit a proposal to Annual Conference for a resolution reaffirming our status as a reconciling conference. Phil Crihfield offered to write it, and Beth Swanick researched the Conference records to find the 1986 resolution. After locating and reading the 1986 resolution, we became aware that the wording of that resolution only referred to “homosexual men and lesbians.” Obviously, since that time other expressions of gender identity and sexual preferences have become known, and PAT felt it important to broaden the proposed resolution to more inclusive language than that of the 1986 resolution. The proposed resolution was unanimously accepted at the First Church Council meeting on April 27, 2021, so the resolution proposal will be submitted for Conference action at the Annual Conference meeting in July. Since that date, other Conference entities and clergy members have signed on to the resolution, as authored by First UMC, Evanston. The proposed resolution can be found [HERE](#). PAT wishes to thank Pastor Grace and Rev. Lyall for their support and guidance in this effort.

Respectfully,

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