

Annual Conference from the Pastor's Perspective

The founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, spoke of what it meant to do Holy Conferencing. Wesley considered Christian Conferencing a means of grace: a way in which we, as God's people, experience God's grace.

Many people going into this year's conference were filled with dread and uncertainty with all that was before us. Folks were uncertain as to what the mood would be. I admit I had some trepidation as well. I was wondering if I would experience the grace of God this year as we gathered.



While I experienced grief and a profound sense of sadness, I also experienced love, grace, and a renewed sense of calling and determination. We participated in wonderful worship services and thoughtful Bible studies. We carried on with the routine business of electing conference leaders and passing the budget. We ordained 7 elders and 1 deacon. We commissioned 5 provisional elders and 1 provisional deacon. We celebrated many, many, years of service for those retiring. Clergy and laity were remembered at the memorial service. Here are a few of the non-routine things that happened:

- We approved the disaffiliation of 298 churches in our annual conference. This occurred at the special called session of Annual Conference on June 14th. Following those votes, we participated in a service of repentance and sending.
- RS 309: Congregations To Pay Royalties When Using Negro Spirituals in Worship was approved after amended. Congregations are strongly encouraged to establish a Negro Spirituals Royalties Project by identifying and tracking all music used by the congregation that is considered to be a Negro Spiritual; offering the opportunity to collect a financial offering every time a Negro Spiritual is used in worship or other church gatherings; identify a partner organization to receive the offering, preferably one committed to teaching and developing African American musicians and/or performing artists, and to provide educational opportunities.
- RS 403 which aimed to establish the IMAP (Intentional Missional Alignment Process) Household Alignment plan, was tabled until Annual Conference 2024. The reasoning for this action was to allow time and space for grief and healing. The IMAP task force was approved to continue its work.

- RS 611 Prioritizing Ethnic/Racial Ministries was passed. In addition to allocating financial resources, The Western PA Conference will prioritize providing support for the identified new and existing Ethnic/Racial ministries at the conference, district, and local church levels including spiritual and prayer support, advertising and promotion, administrative assistance, training for clergy and laity, and facilitating appropriate conference and general agency staff engagement.
- We elected 2 new lay delegates because of transitions of delegates off the General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation, there were two vacancies on the Jurisdictional Conference delegation. Mallory Miles and Jerra Jenrette were elected.

I continue to be amazed by the grace and wisdom with which our Bishop, Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, leads us. This has been even more true in this past year during the disaffiliation process. Our district superintendents and other conference leadership have shown amazing integrity and grace. Our conference trustees worked tirelessly in this last year with congregations through this difficult time.

Our district superintendent, Paul Ritchey, will also begin leading the Pittsburgh district beginning July 1, 2023. The Greensburg District office has also been relocated to Irwin, PA. By July of 2024, we will only have 5 district superintendents with each one covering two districts within our Annual Conference.

So in the midst of change and transition, I continue to have hope in the promises and possibilities of what lies ahead for myself, for the Leechburg First UMC, for the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, and for the Kingdom and **Kindom** of God.

We move forward trusting in God and recommitting ourselves to be the disciples that Jesus Christ has called us to be as we make new disciples, as we reach those on the margins, as we seek to overcome injustice of all kinds, as we become the hands and feet of Christ, as we shine His light in a dark and hurting world!

In service to the Kingdom of God,

Pastor Sara

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

SPECIAL AND WPUMC ANNUAL CONFERENCE JUNE 2023

Hello Church Family,

Thank you for entrusting me to join Don and our Pastors to represent and work for our church at Annual Conference in Erie, PA this past June 2023. We were present for the Special Conference on Weds., June 14, 2023 at which the body voted to approve the churches who are choosing to disaffiliate and to engage in a loving and prayerful worship with their representatives. On Thursday, June 15 through June 17, 2023 we worked on proposed legislature items and engaged in the Plenary sessions in-which the whole body voted regarding issues that impact the churches and the overall WPAUMC Conference. The theme for the Conference was, "Pressing on to Higher Ground." Despite the issues of air quality, the site was hospitable and there were many opportunities for Fellowship, Worship, Prayers and praise of the Lord, with music, song, Bible Study, and opportunities to receive prayer as well as to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. There were opportunities to connect with those leaving the Conference as they completed the processes for same. There was a very moving ordination ceremony with a range of ages of those approved in their processes to serve the Lord and his people. The members were able to celebrate the new assignments, retirements and memorials for our Clergy and their families. My Section Proposal work included voting for continuation of Evangelists for the Conference and attention to recognition of the use of Negro Spiritual music in our worship as well as some budget related issues for care of our Pastors. Thirty-six plus legislative actions were assessed, debated, discussed and voted on in the smaller working sections. God blessed the work with a majority being able to vote by margins such that they were able go to the whole body in a group for a vote. Only 4 proposals needed to be addressed separately by the whole body with assessment, discussion, and discernment for a vote. This was a blessing in many ways. This gave significant time to those items. (included elements related to work by IMAP Task Force work on developing three household plan). Electronic voting was, again, this year a joy to experience!! The status of the work in the Districts and individual churches was highlighted and included an outstanding video regarding outreach and missions. YES!!! LFUMC Caring Crockpot Ministry was present as well as our presence in the COT walk. (Pastor Sara will be sharing videos in the future). The Missions in our conference, our nation and our world had informational tables and products throughout the walkways. Of special note for me are the Evangelist Couple who now have an on-line Church service for those individuals working on addiction recovery with their families, friends, and church bodies. They have a specific Bible Study and materials for churches to use as well. 😊 Of special note was the work to focus on how to be mentally healthy during a time of grief, mourning, and prayers regarding disaffiliations and change. Please continue to pray for all church leadership, members, and those who will join the Lord's flock and their Holy Spirit given gifts. You All Bless me every day in so many ways.

Much Love and Blessings, Prayers, and Thanks,

JO ELLEN STEWART



2023 WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

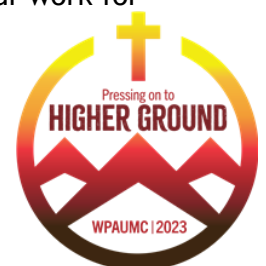
You may know I was a delegate to the Annual Conference held in Erie, PA on June 14 to June 17. The days were full with events and meetings scheduled from 4:00 PM on the 14th through noon on the 17th. Those included Bible Study, Mission Events, Legislative Sessions, Plenary Sessions, Worship Services and the Ordination and Commissioning Service, to name a few. Bishop Moore-Koikoi, Conference leadership and staff did an excellent job of planning and initiating those plans throughout the conference, which was no small feat with well over 1000 in attendance. A few of the notables for me were;

- The Conference began with a Special Session on the 14th, called to vote on the requests for disaffiliation by several churches. This was a bit sad and a solemn session as churches wishing to leave the United Methodist Church were presented to the Conference, District by District, and a vote called. In the end, 298 churches were approved for disaffiliation, leaving 468 churches in the Western PA Conference.
- All delegates received legislative section assignments prior to the conference. I was assigned to a Legislative Section dealing with Finance, Intentional Missional Alignment Process and Rules. This work, as was the work of all delegates, important for the operation of the Western PA Conference and clergy and laity had a chance to speak and vote on assigned legislation.
- During an evening session the conference gathered for the Service of Ordination and Commissioning. The bishop and all clergy donning white robes entered the great hall through the center aisle to the stage area at the front of the hall. We witnessed thirteen people being ordained as elders, deacons and commissioned as provisional elders and provisional deacon. The service closed with Holy Communion. It was a beautiful and moving service.
- At a mission event, a video was presented featuring our Pastor Sara, discussing Leechburg First's Crock Pot Ministry and support for the Communities of Transformation. She did a great job and when I met people afterward and they asked where I was from, when I said Leechburg, I undoubtedly heard "oh you're the crock pot church". The same thing happened at an evening Laity Session when delegates met to discuss outreach and mission programs at their churches. Again when I mentioned Leechburg, I heard "oh the crock pot church".
- Youth involvement - Many young people were present serving as pages and supporting staff with various services. Several programs involving the youth of the church were presented as well as events at all the Conference supported camps. It was good to see the youth involved... they are the future.

There were many other important meetings, sessions and services but the above stood out for me. As I was driving home and thinking about all the work done and what I heard and saw, I had a feeling of hope and optimism for what God has in store for the United Methodist Church. The number of churches in our Conference may be a little smaller but our work for God's Kingdom will go on. As Bishop Moore-Koikoi said during her state of the church message, "the state of the church is good...and getting better".

Thank you Leechburg First for allowing me to represent our church, it was a privilege and an honor for me to attend.

Blessings,
Don Sheaffer





AUGUST

Ruth Hyer 8/1
Jim Swarts 8/1
Suzanne Swarts 8/8
Denny Hrivnak 8/17
Mark Morrill 8/22
Rachel Rowe 8/22
Nancy Morrill 8/31
Paula Kalmar 8/28

SEPTEMBER

Cannon Rowe 9/2
Pastor Sara 9/13
Karen Bittinger 9/24

If you would like to tell us when your birthday is please let us know and we will put you in a future newsletter!!



SAT. AUGUST 12 11am to 2pm

Main Street in Leechburg
Between First and Second Streets
Free food, refreshments, games, music, and more!

Sponsored by the
Leechburg Ministerial Association

Please RSVP:
servinggodgracefully.net/bts



BLOCK PARTY DONATIONS

In preparation for the Back to School Bash sponsored by the Ministerial Association and other community groups, we will be collecting funds to provide hot dogs and crayons. The crayons will be added to a bag of other school supplies that will be given to all children that day. Our church will be giving away hot dogs. Please indicate on your check or envelope that you are donating for the Back to School Bash.

Our Finances

Following is the most recent Treasurer's Report, for the month ending June 30, 2023.

Beginning Balance	\$18,645.46
Deposits	\$11,571.35
Expenditures	-\$14,756.09
Balance	\$15,460.72
Designated Funds	-\$11,299.16
Working Balance	\$ 4,161.56

June expenditures exceeded deposits by \$3,184.74, which was not good news but just over one half of the total was drawn from designated funds. These included expenditures for food and supplies for the outreach missions, social affairs and a payment to the food bank. Nearly all of the balance was to cover lodging expenses for our delegates to the Annual Conference. The good news is that we finished the month with a positive working balance after all bills were paid. As I have mentioned in the past, a month-end surplus allows for funds to cover expenses in months where deposits alone are not sufficient to do so. Thank you for your continued contributions to the General Fund which are very much appreciated and needed to maintain a positive working balance.

Connectional Apportionment;

As you know our 2023 goal is \$24,013.00. To date through June, we have paid \$8,936.00 (37%) leaving a balance of \$15,077.00. To meet the goal requires a monthly payment of \$2001.08. We were able to make that payment amount during the first three months of the year, but slipped the past three months with about half that amount. To meet the goal now with six months remaining will require a monthly payment of \$2,513.00. This will be a challenge for sure but with prayer and our pulling together meeting goal is very much possible.

Rise Against Hunger Campaign:

Back in January we designated the first Sunday of each month as a special offering Sunday for Rise Against Hunger. A goal was set at \$2,000.00 to be raised before the packaging event in September. As of June 30th that goal has been met and exceeded with a total of \$2,439.06 contributed. Thank you very much for your support of this important mission. (If you are interested in participating in the packaging event, it will be held in Kittanning on September 9, 2023, so mark your calendar. More details to follow in the near future). With this goal met, the first Sunday of each month will be a special Sunday for our Outreach and Missions Team.

Thank you very much for your support of the ministries and missions of our church. Your contributions allow the work for God's Kingdom to continue in many ways.

Blessings,
Don Sheaffer
Stewardship & Finance

OUTREACH

Articles submitted by Lori Klingensmith, Chairperson

Mission Outreach Meeting

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, August 8th at 10:30 AM.

Feeding Our Neighbors

We will meet Tuesday, August 8th at 9:30 AM to make sandwiches for the community. We will pack the bags Monday, August 7th at 9:30 AM in the fellowship hall. If you are interested in helping, just show up, we would be happy to have you!

Future calendar:

We will be making sandwiches for the Leechburg School & the high rises on Tuesday, September 12th at 9:30 AM. We will have a meeting following the sandwich delivery. We will be packing the lunch bags following the worship service on September 10th. If you would like to help please stay and have some fun with us! Thank you!

Special Offering

We will be taking a Special Offering the first Sunday of each month for the Mission/Outreach Team. This money will help us provide turkeys and hams for the community during the months of November and December. Thank you so much for your continued support!



Caring Crockpot Ministry

Sept 6, 13, & 20 from 2:30 PM-4:30 PM

Oct 4, 11, & 18 from 2:30 PM-4:30 PM

Nov 1, 8, & 15 from 2:30PM- 4:30PM

If you are interested in helping please contact Lori.

POT LOVE LUNCHEON

A special thank you to those who helped with the POT LOVE Lunch on July 15th!

On Saturday, August 19th we will be cooking and serving another POT LOVE Lunch at the Cross Roads Church. We will be cooking with our crockpots and hoping to have our past Crockpot Ministry students helping to prepare & serve this meal. If you are interested in helping please let me know.

PULLED PORK LUNCHEON

We will be having a Pulled Pork Luncheon on Sunday, October 8th.
More details to follow.



Choir practice will start back up on Monday, August 28 at 6:30. Practice will be September 11, 18, and 24th. The choir will be singing September 10th and September 24th. If you enjoy singing please come and have a night of fellowship, fun, and singing our hearts out!!! I look forward to seeing your smiling faces and hearing your beautiful voices.

*Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs!
Psalm 100:2*

NURTURE

Articles submitted by Shawna Johns, Chairperson



The annual church picnic will be Sunday, August 6th at the Gilpin-Leechburg Park Pavilion #3 (by the playground and restrooms). The Worship Service will start at 10:00 AM with lunch to follow. We will also have an auction during the picnic to raise funds for the Nurture Committee.

Please bring a covered dish to share, your own place settings, and a comfortable chair, if needed. There will be a sign-up sheet in the vestibule to sign-up for what you plan to bring.

We hope to see you all there!!



Rise Against Hunger is on September 9th at the First UMC in Kittanning. We have surpassed our goal of \$2,000! Thanks so much for your generous donations!

New Member Class



**Become
Part of
Our
Church
Family**

If you, or anyone you know, are interested in joining the church please contact Pastor Sara or the church office. Thank you!

ONLINE SCHEDULING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILY APPOINTMENT SETTING

- ✧ Go to the Universal Church Directories website (www.ucdir.com)
- ✧ Click on the box on the right side of the homepage entitled “photography appointment scheduling login”
- ✧ Enter your church code [pa1019](#)
- ✧ Enter your church password [photos](#)
- ✧ Click on the Enter button
- ✧ Click on the desired photography date
- ✧ Click on the Reserve Time button beside the desired photography appointment time
- ✧ Enter the appropriate information in all required fields (indicated by the asterisk)
- ✧ Click on the Schedule Appointment button at the bottom of the screen to reserve the photography appointment time in your family’s name
- ✧ If you have more than six family members being photographed, please reserve two appointments consecutively (such as 6:00 and 6:10)
- ✧ Print the next screen to use as a reminder of your family’s photography appointment
- ✧ **Contact your church’s online scheduling administrator to change or cancel your photography appointment**

Dear Church *family,*
It's time for a New Directory!



*Celebrating faith.
Connecting families.
Sharing hope.*

When people enter the doors of our church they are looking for a place to belong. Our directory brings us together to develop new relationships, connect with our own families and reconnect with those we haven't seen in a while. Join us for this "Connections Event" and be part of what God is doing right here at our church!

Directory Committee

Connections Event

Our church directory will not be complete without you. Join us to celebrate faith and family with our new church family album.

- Schedule your professional photography session when you stop by the sign-up table at church or simply go online and follow the instructions below. If we don't see your name on our list of appointments, you will receive a phone call inviting you to participate.
- Everyone who is photographed by Universal will receive a complimentary 8 x 10 portrait and a directory!
- Universal provides a complete professional portrait studio right here at our church! You'll enjoy a variety of poses, backgrounds, portrait sizes, finish and framing options AND have the opportunity to purchase portraits to give to family and friends.

Set your appointment with Universal today!



*Gathering families,
Connecting generations.*



**Leechburg First United Methodist Church
251 Main Street
Leechburg, PA 15656**

Dates of Pictures- Tuesday, August 29th from 2-8:30 p.m. & Wednesday, August 30th from 2-8:30 p.m.

Worship Leader Schedule for August & September

Date	Name
August 6, 10 th Sunday after Pentecost/Picnic	
August 13, 11 th Sunday after Pentecost	Gloria Womer
August 20, 12 th Sunday after Pentecost	Jo Ellen Stewart
August 27, 13 th Sunday after Pentecost	Don Sheaffer
*September 3, 14 th Sunday after Pentecost	Marilyn Oldfield
September 10, 15 th Sunday after Pentecost	M.J. Cline
September 17, 16 th Sunday after Pentecost	Deb Loftus
September 24, 17 th Sunday after Pentecost	Gloria Womer

Greeter Schedule for August & September

Date	Names
August 6, 10 th Sunday after Pentecost/Picnic	Don & Brentta Sheaffer
August 13, 11 th Sunday after Pentecost	Bob & Vange Stewart
August 20, 12 th Sunday after Pentecost	Gloria Womer, June Womer
August 27, 13 th Sunday after Pentecost	Alana Gipson
*September 3, 14 th Sunday after Pentecost	Sandy Ashbaugh, Cathy Kepple
September 10, 15 th Sunday after Pentecost	Cindy Hughes, Becky Blankenship
September 17, 16 th Sunday after Pentecost	Don & Brentta Sheaffer
September 24, 17 th Sunday after Pentecost	Bob & Vange Stewart

First United Methodist Church

251 Main Street

Leechburg, Pennsylvania 15656-1394



The Stepping Stone

“Growing, Loving & Serving in Christ’s Name.”

Aug/Sept 2023

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared especially for...

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Vandergrift, PA



Aug/Sept 2023
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YouTube

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