

Annual Conference 101: (Almost) Everything You Need to Know About The 2010 Annual Conference Session!

Slide 1:

“Annual Conference” – it’s here again. This year is the 2nd year of the 2009-2012 “quadrennium” – that’s one of those distinctly United Methodist words that we’ll talk about later. While many of you have attended Annual Conference before, some of you are attending this year for the first time.

This presentation is designed to help all of us – first time attenders and seasoned veterans alike – get a handle on what the Annual Conference is about and how to navigate the sometimes confusing ways that we “do conference.”

Slide 2

“Conference” is another one of those good United Methodist words that we use to describe different gatherings within the life of the church. It is the term used for the annual meetings of every local congregation as well as the world-wide gathering that takes place every four years called “General Conference” - and every level of gathering in between. If you want to learn more about the structure of our denomination and how we organize ourselves for ministry, there is an excellent “short course” called UM 101 that can be found on the United Methodist Church’s website at www.umc.org. But the important thing to remember is that, when we gather as an Annual Conference, we are a part of a much larger whole, and other United Methodists around the country, and indeed around the world, will be doing the same thing in their Annual Conferences this spring and summer.

Slide 3

The Book of Discipline is our book of church law, as well as our guide for organizing the work and ministry of The United Methodist Church at all levels. Every four years the General Conference revises and re-writes this important book, which tells us that

“The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.”

Each annual conference has its own unique way of turning that purpose – making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world – into reality. What we hope you will gain in the next few minutes is a better understanding of how the Wisconsin Annual Conference goes about the business of transforming the world by making Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Slide 4

In its simplest definition a “conference” is a gathering of people who “confer” – meaning talk, discuss, make decisions, about a topic – or topics. And “annual,” of course, means once a year. So an “Annual Conference” is a yearly gathering of United Methodists who discuss and make decisions about things that will help us to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

But the Annual Conference is much more than that.

Slide 5

In the world of sports a conference is a grouping of geographically related teams. In The United Methodist Church, a conference is an organization of geographically related “ministry teams.”

The work of the Annual Conference doesn't end when the Annual Conference Session – that once a year gathering we spoke about - is over. In fact, when the Annual Conference session ends - the work is just beginning. Throughout the year “ministry teams” of The Wisconsin Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church will be working together to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Slide 6

The “Annual Conference” is made up of both Clergy Persons and Lay Persons. These folks are “members” of the Annual Conference. The clergy membership of the Annual Conference is defined by **The Book of Discipline**, and includes Elders, Deacons, Associate Members, Provisional Members, and Local Pastors. (By the way, “Provisional Member” is a new term. We used to call these folks “Probationary Members,” but the 2008 General Conference changed the terminology.)

Most of the Lay Members of the Annual Conference are elected by their “Charge Conference.” Some charges have more than one Lay Member, while some charges have only one lay member, even though there is more than one church in the charge. It all depends upon how many clergy members are appointed to the charge and the total membership of the charge. There are other persons who are Lay Members of the Annual Conference because they hold a particular office or position that is defined either in **The Book of Discipline** or the Conference Rules. By our Conference Rules, Lay Members of the Annual Conference are elected for a four-year term called a “quadrennium.”

It's also important to understand that both the Clergy Members and the Lay Members are NOT ‘delegates to’ the Annual Conference, and they are NOT ‘members to’ the Annual Conference. They are **MEMBERS OF** the annual conference.

Slide 7

In theory, at least, the number of Lay Members of the Annual Conference is equal to the number of Clergy Members of the Annual Conference. In reality, there are usually more lay persons present at the Annual Conference session than there are clergy persons present – often because many of our retired clergy members are no longer able to attend the Annual Conference session. There will probably be about 1100 people present at the Annual Conference session in LaCrosse this year.

Slide 8

The “Annual Conference” is more than just the annual gathering that takes place in June. It consists of lay and clergy volunteers, as well as the Bishop, District Superintendents, Lay and Clergy Staff members – employees of the Annual Conference, many Boards, Committees, Agencies, Ministries. All go about the task of organizing and implementing the work of “making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World” throughout the year. Literally hundreds of people are involved in “the annual conference” – both before and after the “annual conference session” – working to turn that purpose into reality.

Slide 9

Most of you who are watching this presentation will be coming to the Annual Conference session in LaCrosse, Wisconsin from June 13-16. If this is your first time “coming to Annual Conference,” it may seem a bit bewildering. Just what is it that we will be “doing” on those four days in June?

Well, a lot of things. Of course, we will gather for Worship – every day. And the singing alone is worth the trip. If you’ve never heard a thousand voices raised in songs of praise to God you will be absolutely overawed. There will be moments of celebration as we ordain, commission and license person to be clergy leaders in congregations.

Slide 10

We will “conference” – we’ll talk with one another and listen. We will hear about what is happening, and what could and should happen.

We will celebrate the ministries of new congregations. And we will give thanks to God for the ministries of congregations that are no longer able to carry on their ministry and have decided that the best way to be faithful in their particular circumstances is to discontinue, so that resources can be better utilized in other ways.

Slide 11

We will make decisions that will guide our ministries for the coming year. And we will take care of important Administrative Details – like approving a conference budget for 2011 – so that ministry can happen.

Perhaps the most important part of the Annual Conference Session is re-connecting with friends and colleagues. The relationships we develop with one another are vital to what the Annual Conference is all about as we work to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

Slide 12

There are some things that happen at the Annual Conference session that are “unusual” – meaning that they don’t necessarily happen every year.

This year – 2010 – we will have an opportunity to spend time in an in-depth discussion about the issue of homosexuality in relationship to the church – and we will attempt to do so in ways that enable us to listen to and respect people whose opinions on the subject may differ from our own.

Slide 13

In 2011 a significant portion of the Annual Conference Session will be devoted to electing delegates from the Wisconsin Annual Conference to the 2012 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. That election process is also something unique to The United Methodist Church. You may want to begin thinking now about whether or not you would like to be considered as a potential delegate to the 2012 General or Jurisdictional Conference. Take the opportunity to talk with members of the 2008 delegation to learn more about their experiences serving in that capacity. We will also be discussing petitions to the 2012 General Conference that propose changes in The book of Discipline.

Slide 14

So, what can you expect when you get to LaCrosse?

When we gather on Sunday, June 13, the laity and clergy will meet separately in the “Laity Session”, and the “Clergy Session.” Details about the Laity Session are pre-conference workbook mailing, and in the packet you will receive at registration.

The “Clergy Session” will be held at the same time, but in a different room. The reason for these separate gatherings is simple. The Clergy Session is required by **The Book of Discipline**. There are certain matters related to the ordination, character and conference relations of clergy members of the annual conference that, according to **The Book of Discipline**, must be decided by the Clergy Members in Full Connection of the Annual Conference in a Clergy Session.

On Sunday evening, the Ordination Service will take place. If you've never attended a United Methodist Ordination Service, you should really plan to be there. It's one of the high points of the Annual Conference Session. The journey to this very special moment for those being ordained has been a lengthy one – many years of education, service, reflection, prayer and affirmation – and sometimes tears and frustration, too. Ordination is the moment when the church says “YES” to God's call in the lives of those being ordained – you won't want to miss it!

Slide 15

On Monday morning Bishop Lee, who presides at the annual conference session, will call the plenary session to order and we will get ourselves “organized” to do business this year.

The first action we will take is to “set the bar of the annual conference.” While not uniquely United Methodist – in fact it goes back to the early days of the British Parliament – it is important. “Setting the Bar of the Conference” means establishing the “official voting area” for this conference session. It's the area where votes will be counted. When votes are taken during the conference session, members must be “within the bar.” If you are outside of the “bar of the conference” at the time a vote is taken, your vote will not be counted.

We'll do some other things to get ourselves organized, and then we will begin considering the issues that are coming before the Annual Conference Session this year. Some of those issues have already been explained and discussed in other presentations during the regional pre-conference gatherings.

Slide 16

During the Annual Conference Session there will be times of informal discussion, and there will be times of formal debate.

When it comes time to actually make decisions on issues and take votes, we will be using a form of “Parliamentary Procedure” that is often referred to as “Roberts’

Rules of Order” – which is a set of guidelines for orderly conversation and decision making in large groups. A “Parliamentary Procedure Guide” has been printed on the back cover of the Pre-Conference Workbook which you received in the mail.

Slide 17

The “Action Items” printed in the Pre-Conference Workbook are the proposals that have come to the annual conference from various boards, committees, agencies and individuals for its consideration, and which require a vote. They may be discussed, and if the annual conference chooses to do so, may be amended. Some of them may be placed on a “consent agenda,” meaning that we will consider and approve all of those items at the same time.

Slide 18

There are two “special circumstances” that affect the way we as an Annual Conference handle certain motions. One of these applies to any motion from the floor of the Annual Conference that would CHANGE the proposed budget by more than \$10,000. By our conference rules, this motion must be sent to the IMPLICATIONS COMMITTEE, which then considers, as its name implies, the implications of the motion, and makes a report back to the annual conference before the conference takes any action on the motion.

The second special circumstance is a conference rule which requires that any proposal which would change our Conference Rules must be presented to the Annual Conference at least 24 hours before a vote can be taken on the proposed change. This was put in place many years ago so that we don’t make hasty changes to our rules and procedures that might have far-reaching consequences without the opportunity to consider those changes thoughtfully.

This rule does not apply to motions to “suspend the rules.” We will sometimes do that in order to consider business in a timely manner. Any motion to “suspend the rules” must be approved by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting.

Slide 19

So – we’re in the middle of a debate on the floor of Annual Conference and you decide you want to speak – how do you do that?

First – Fluorescent Orange Cards will be distributed at the Annual Conference Session, either in your packet of materials when you register or on the tables in the plenary area. This Orange Card is your means of getting the Bishop’s attention, because everyone who speaks on the floor of Annual Conference has to be recognized by the Bishop first before they can go to the microphone.

If you want to speak, you raise your “Orange Card” in the air.

If the Bishop sees your orange card and recognizes you, then you can get up and proceed to the microphone designated by the bishop. There will be several microphones on stands at various places around the floor of the room where we will be meeting – and each microphone is numbered.

Slide 20

When you have been recognized and are at the microphone, you begin by stating your name, whether you are lay or clergy, and the name of your local church if you are a layperson, or where you are appointed, if you are a clergy person.

You then get to make your speech – which must be no longer than three minutes!

We also try to alternate speakers for and against any particular issue. It doesn’t always work out that way, but we try!

Slide 21

Sometimes people want to make a “motion.” That’s a proposal that they want the annual conference to act on.

There are two kinds of motions:

- Substantive motions are ones that relate to the content of whatever it is that we are discussing.
- Procedural motions are ones that relate to the way we are dealing with a particular issue.

The “Parliamentary Procedure Guide” on the back cover of your pre-conference workbook describes these various kinds of motions, so be sure to take a look at it.

Slide 22

To make a motion, the first thing you need to do is write it out on a “motion form,” which will be in the packet you receive when you register at Annual Conference or on the tables in the plenary area. All substantive motions have to be submitted to the Conference Secretary in writing before the conference can act on them.

Then, you need to get the Bishop’s attention by requesting permission to speak – as we described earlier.

Slide 23

Once you have been recognized you start out by stating your name, lay or clergy, and local church, then say

“I move that ……” (you fill in the rest here).

This is VERY IMPORTANT – you need to make your motion BEFORE you speak to it.

If you make a speech first, and then make your motion – your motion will be ruled “out of order.” That’s one of the rules of parliamentary procedure that we abide by in order to have orderly discussion.

If you haven't already done so, you need to immediately send the written motion to the Conference Secretary's table. Then you may speak to your motion – up to a maximum of three minutes!

Slide 24

Sometimes you may want to propose making a change to something that the Annual Conference is already considering. That's called "amending the motion." The procedure for amending a motion is very similar to making a "Main Motion." You first have to be recognized in order to speak.

Slide 25

Again, you make your "motion to amend" before you speak to it.

Because you are proposing a change to something that the Annual Conference is already considering, motions to amend need to refer to a specific place in what the annual conference is already considering.

All of the "Action Items" have an "Action Item Number." They are located on a specific page in the workbook, and with the exception of the Proposed 2011 budget the lines on each workbook page are numbered.

The more details you give about where and what it is that you wish to change, the easier it will be for everyone else to follow along with your proposed changes.

The proposed change should also be as specific as possible, such as:

"I move to amend "Action Item 95" on page 15 by deleting the words "Martin Luther" in line 17 and replacing them with the words "John Wesley."

Slide 26

There will be many times during the Annual Conference Session when we take a vote on a motion. There are five different ways that we can take a vote. Depending upon the nature of what we are voting on, Bishop Lee will decide the method of voting. Sometimes the result of a show of hands will be obvious. If it is not, the Bishop may ask people to vote by standing. If it is still not obvious, the Bishop may ask a group of “tellers” to count the number of people who vote “yes” and the number of people who vote “no.” In some rare circumstances it may be necessary to take a “written ballot.”

Bishop Lee will give instructions regarding how we are voting, so it’s important to pay close attention. – AND – be sure you are “within the bar of the conference” when you vote!

Slide 27

The number of votes that it takes to pass a particular motion depends upon the kind of motion that it is. Some motions are approved by a simple majority. Some motions require a two-thirds majority. Only in VERY RARE circumstances does a motion require a three-fourths majority.

The parliamentary procedure guide on the back cover of your pre-conference workbook indicates what vote is required for each type of motion to pass.

Slide 28

As you have probably figured out by now, the United Methodist Church has its own language – and it’s not always easy to learn. We are very fond of using “acronyms” – like GBHEM, COSROW, and CFA, and we make up our own words, like “quadrennium” and “apportionment.”

There is a ‘Guide to “Methodist Speak.”’ in the Pre-Conference Workbook and on your Pre-Conference Resource CD.

Slide 29

There are some things that you can do to get ready for the Annual Conference Session before you get there.

The first is to make sure that you are already registered for the Annual Conference Session. If you haven't yet registered, please remember that after Monday, May 20 there will be an additional \$50 late registration charge.

Be sure to read the materials that have been mailed out to you so that you can come to conference prepared to listen, talk, and vote in an informed way.

Slide 30

Along with your pre-conference workbook you received a "Pre-Conference Resource CD." This disk contains a wealth of information about various ministries of the Annual Conference, including the reports of Conference Boards and Agencies that don't require action by the Annual Conference Session. Almost all of the documents on the disk are in what is known as the "Portable Document Format" – PDF's. The latest 'Windows' version of the Adobe Reader program – which you may install on your computer to read the documents – is on the disk.

The 2010 Clergy Information Form is on the disk. If you are a clergy person who is moving this year, or if the information listed for you in the 2009 Directory needs to be updated, please be sure to print this form, complete it, and return it to the Conference Secretary as soon as possible.

Slide 31

Every year the Conference Secretary produces a book called the "Conference Yearbook and Journal" – or "Journal" for short. This book is a record of the actions of the annual conference, the reports of the boards and agencies, and a resource filled with information that allows us to "connect" with one another and be in ministry together.

The Pre-Conference Resource CD contains electronic versions of the Conference Journals for the years 2002 through 2009.

In prior years the Journal has been distributed in printed form. Beginning this year the Conference Journal will only be available for general distribution in electronic format. It will be available for download at no charge from the Conference Website, or as a CD-ROM which you may order from the Service Department at the Conference Center. There is a Journal CD Order Form on your pre-conference resource disk. You may also order a copy of the CD when you register for Annual Conference. The cost of the CD-ROM is \$10.

By distributing both the pre-conference material and the Journal electronically, we will be saving almost half a million pages of paper as well as about \$15,000 in print costs.

Slide 32

Please be sure to bring your pre-conference Workbook with you to the Annual Conference Session.

Extra printed copies of the pre-Conference Workbook will NOT be available at the Annual Conference session at La Crosse.

You should also bring your copy of “The Community in Conversation: Homosexuality,” which is the devotional guide we will use to focus our conversations on this subject during the Annual Conference Session.

Slide 33

There are other things that you can bring that aren’t “required,” but would be really helpful to you.

- If you have a copy of the 2008 Book of Discipline, bring it along. If you don’t have a copy, the Cokesbury bookstore display will have copies available should you wish to purchase one.

- Most of the materials you receive will be 3-hole punched, and a 3-hole punch will be available. So a 3-ring binder to keep materials organized may help.
- Many of our congregations have been making or collecting items for the Ingathering. Be sure to bring them to LaCrosse when you come. More information about where the Ingathering Items will be collected will be available prior to Annual Conference, and the location will be posted at the Annual Conference session.
- There will be a number of offerings taken during the worship services at Annual Conference. Those offerings will be used to support various ministries designated by Bishop Lee, which will be announced at each worship service. If you would like to support those offerings, please come prepared.

Slide 34

The LaCrosse Center is completely handicap accessible – but the rooms we will be using for meetings and meals are located at various places throughout the conference center, as well as at the Radisson Hotel, so quite a bit of walking will be required. If you do not select the conference meal plan for lunches, you will need to plan to visit one of the many restaurants in downtown La Crosse for noon meals.

Slide 35

In previous years wireless internet access has been available in the plenary area. That will NOT be the case this year. There will also NOT be places in the plenary area to plug laptop computers or other electrical devices into electricity, so please plan accordingly.

Slide 36

We are looking forward to seeing all of you at the Annual Conference Session at the La Crosse Center this June. Travel safely, and come prepared to be about the work of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.”

Slide 37

If you would like to view this presentation again, you may download it from the Wisconsin Conference website at www.wisconsinumc.org/secretary/. A version of the presentation is also included on your Pre-Conference Resource CD.