

Bishop Jung, Assistant to the Bishop Steve Polster, District Superintendents, Conference Secretary Amber Wolover, members of Annual Conference and guests –

Dear People of God All, Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, are you called? Am I called? The answer is **"yes"**- without exception. Each of us is a beautiful child of God. Each of us is called **by God...according to our gifts. Many and diverse gifts, united in the Body of Christ** for the glory of God. The ministry of all Christians is complementary. We are the whole people of God together. We are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence. We are instructed to be good stewards of the resources and gifts God has lavished upon us, around us and within us. We are instructed to build each other up. **As God's creation we have an infinite supply of love, praise, nurturing, encouragement, mentoring, self control and patience.** Of course, not by our own efforts alone, but in God all things are possible. We are instructed to lavish our joy and love and abundance on others. I like the way **Paul expresses it in Jude 1:20: "Dear friends, you must build each other up in your most holy faith and pray in the power of the holy spirit."** Paul instructs similarly in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and again in Romans 14:19 and Ephesians 4:16 and so on.

We read in **1 Peter 2:9: "And you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."** All of us together are a people belonging to God. And we are not alone. This assurance is given to us throughout the Bible. And thank God. Because, the creation that we are has significant limitations on its own. Our very breath of life is God-provided. Regardless of our inadvertent and conscious behaviors that separate us from God, God is persistently present and sustaining. More than that, God creates and re-creates. Revelation 20:56 tells us, **"I am making everything new"**...everything. **That's you and me, too!** Here, **God is calling us to something radical...God is calling us to God-sized dreams.**

We know our United Methodist Church mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Inherent in our ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ is that we are disciples of Jesus Christ ourselves! Inherent in our ability to transform the world is that we have been transformed ourselves! So that the kingdom of God is manifest on Earth in us! This Eden of harmony and abundance calls each of us to embody Christ. **In Joel Raney's beautiful song for choirs, "We Are the Hands of Christ", he asks "How will they hear the message that Jesus is alive? How can they know the truth unless it's through our lives?" And he goes on, "no candle in the night, no justice, no right; touching the desperate; reaching the hopeless in Jesus' name. Christ has no hands except our own to reach the world and make him known."** We are called to Christ-like living...24/7, friends. It is a holy call.

You've probably heard the expression "God isn't finished with me yet!" Bishop Jung admonished us at the celebration service for his assignment as Bishop to Wisconsin Annual Conference last year in Wausau, that being a Christian and a pew potato are incompatible! Did you think about that after he said it? Did you repeat it in your local congregation?

We talk a lot about discerning our call. And **this is an important step...it requires quiet space and time to listen to God.** And it may require trying something, then redirecting or restarting, **and more than once. God isn't calling us to be perfect. God IS calling us to live out of God's**

abundance in love, service, expectation and faith in the world. Rev Karen Hagen says that we often get stuck in the discernment stage and never leave it.

Each of us is called by God. The question is: "What is your **response?**" Bishop Jung asked us **yesterday in opening worship: "What business are we in?"** Our world is changing. We need new forms of ministry. And we all need to work together in new ways. We at Conference Board of Laity are making efforts to provide programs and courses to help your journey. We are dedicated to modeling, mentoring, resourcing, teaching, and equipping clergy and laity for collaborative ministry, healthy relationships, effective communication and mutual accountability. We do this primarily through our lay servant ministries courses, lay leadership trainings and Faith Alive!

How do we answer that call? How do we respond? Living our faith 24/7, is that what God is **calling us to? If so, then what is needed? Continual growing in our skills, seeking God's will for** our lives, engagement with our community? Continual searching for places to have safe conversations with other seekers, questioning, struggling and desiring a closer walk with Christ? A place to be engaged, equipped, encouraged, empowered and set out? Many of our faithful laity have been asking. They are ready to engage in ministry 24/7. Do you know someone like that? Perhaps they have taken the 2-year Faith Alive! journey to discover how to be in ministry in their workplace, home, community and the world. In that journey they discover what gifts they have been blessed with and that others **struggle too...that the spiritual journey** is not without bumps and setbacks. Let the setbacks be a place of learning and re-evaluation, perhaps adjustment or redirection, rather than a stopping place. A Child of **God...YES. Life changing...YES.** Life giving, living faith 24/7...YES. A Faith Alive! class has a maximum of 25 students. Faith Alive! is committed and intentional about providing a safe, supportive, loving, giving and sharing environment for making disciples. Core to Faith Alive! is the opportunity to study with others seeking more depth in faith development and in providing an environment **away from home and work that is conducive to dedicating one's time to spiritual development** with diverse students and faculty/leaders. Faculty person and the spiritual director for the class artfully and sensitively probe and inquire and suggest to give the student the optimum faith journey. Students who study, worship, eat, question and learn together in this small group become a close faith community of loving, caring, nurturing and encouraging members. The student journeys on his or her individual faith path with the support of the close faith community. They report things like confirming their faith, several on the path to licensed local pastor, gained skills and understanding to improvement their relationships and meet new people; learning/improving spiritual practices; having my mind opened up and challenged, opened my eyes to some issues I need to work on, a clearer understanding of where I am on my faith journey; a solid foundation to further my faith; keeping Sabbath so I have time with God; I learned I am worthy and I can accept any challenge God can give me; I learned to be accepting of all others as they are; I learned to listen more and talk less; I learned to trust my instincts; I have come away from it with a stronger faith in God - and myself; I have never tried 'drugs' but I think I have a feeling of 'high' from God. AWESOME!! April 2013 marks the 11th Faith Alive! course completed. Many Faith Alive! graduates have become leaders in their local churches, communities, districts, Wisconsin Conference and the World. The Faith Alive! class begun September 2012 is mid-way; and we have a new 2-year Faith Alive! course beginning September 2013. Registration is open now. Brochures are in your AC packets and more information is available on the Conference website homepage which is www.wisconsinumc.org

at the "education" tab. May I tempt you a moment? Bishop Jung is faculty for the first weekend of the new course beginning this September. Thank you, Bishop. We are ready to live into the vision for Imagining Wisconsin Anew!

The Lay Servant Ministries program provides a wide array of basic and advanced courses in the caring, leading and communicating ministries including lay speakers. Lay Servant Ministries is an expression of our understanding that each one of us has a responsibility in our spiritual life to help others along on their spiritual journey. The Lay Servant Ministries classes are designed to provide ways of equipping laity for ministry in the world. Early Methodism stressed both personal holiness and social holiness. We too believe it is not enough to be formed in the faith without outward expressions of that faith that we live out in our homes, workplaces and communities. There is a wide variety of studies from spiritual gifts inventory to devotional life in the Wesleyan tradition, leading in prayer, recovering the tradition of class leaders, leading in stewardship, leading in evangelism, our United Methodist beliefs, daily disciplines, preaching, becoming accountable disciples and dancing with words/tell stories, a course that Mr. Ray Buckley wrote. Lay Servant Ministry courses are offered throughout our Annual Conference. Your District or Regional Directors of Lay Servant Ministries are your contact and resource people. Check the Lay Servant Ministries brochure in your AC packet for the District Director of Lay Servant Ministries near you! Your District Director of Lay Servant Ministries can resource you for a course you would like that has not yet been designed or presented in your district. Several of the courses including the basic course are now available in Spanish. The District Directors of Lay Servant Ministries post scheduled courses on the Conference website which you can access on the www.wisconsinumc.org homepage at "education" and click on "lay training opportunities" on the drop down menu. As we conduct trainings and attend events around the Conference, laity ask for more Lay Servant Ministries classes. We are working to improve access to classes for the laity through the large geographic area of the Wisconsin Annual Conference; and we are working to improve the scope and variety of courses available at a time when the Board of Laity is emphasizing the value and need for laity to think in terms of personal, leadership and spiritual growth for their lifetimes. And I want to remind you that the UMW Mission U and annual stewardship workshops and seminars sponsored by the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation offer advanced lay servant credit. The purpose is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who will be equipped for ministry within their local church and beyond.

What do 228 churches in the Wisconsin Annual Conference have in common? They have lay leaders, lay members of Annual Conference and/or other laity leadership and clergy who have attended Lay Leader/Lay Member of Annual Conference training. The district lay leaders present workshops each spring and fall throughout the Wisconsin Annual Conference specifically for local church lay leaders, lay members to annual conference and clergy and appropriate for all laity especially those in local church leadership positions and committee members. The purpose is to equip and resource lay leaders and lay members of annual conference for their roles. Essential to the impact of the training is the design of the leadership team comprising District Superintendent, District Lay Leaders and Conference Lay Leader and/or Past Conference Lay Leader demonstrating the effect and power of collaborative ministry. A wealth of printed materials provided by Wisconsin Conference as well as general boards and agencies fills the **participants' folders, e.g. engage conflict well booklet, map of Wisconsin districts, a recent issue of Reflections, Resource Catalog for Lay Servant Ministries.** We promote, for example, ENEWS, the Wisconsin Conference website and the lay training opportunities page there, the General

Board of Discipleship website with its wealth of resources for laity. These trainings generate an enormous amount of goodwill for the district and Wisconsin Annual Conference, give encouragement to build each other up, put practical resources and information into the **participants' hands and minds** and hearts to equip them for service, to connect them to their district/regional leaders who will resource them, and to connect them to the Wisconsin Conference and general church resources and services. Each attendee is requested to complete an evaluation at the end of the training. The evaluations are reviewed immediately by the leadership team. What we learn is that we are meeting a critical and widespread need for more training and to connect people to the vast printed, online and human resources that are available in our connectional system so they are equipped for their ministries. We are a people called by God to be the kingdom of heaven on earth. Let us equip ourselves for this holy work.

It is my honor and privilege and my call to serve the sacred office of Conference Lay Leader of the Wisconsin Annual Conference. I will do my very best to be the servant leader I am called by God to be. Bishop Jung, I think often of your washing my feet last fall in Wausau at the celebration of your assignment as Bishop to the Wisconsin Annual Conference. It lives on in **me, a deep, deep "strangely warmed" feeling beyond any words I have to express the** profoundness of the experience. People who witnessed you washing my feet ask me about the **experience...they do. I prepared by studying the story in John 13 of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. And when Jesus finishes washing his disciples' feet, he asks them: "Do you understand what I have done? I have set the example, and you should do for each other exactly what I have done for you. I tell you for certain that servants are not greater than their master, and messengers are not greater than the one who sent them. You know these things, and God will bless you if you do them."**

Bishop Jung, I request a moment of privilege to introduce the Board of Laity. ...Thank you.

I would like to recognize the Members of the Conference Board of Laity who are faithful, dedicated and generous servants. They work together in a most wonderful way. They support each other and are a blessing to me and this Annual Conference. They are all volunteers! Please stand as I call your name and remain standing. Mark Sheets, Metro North District Lay Leader; Denise Retzleff, just now stepping away from Winnebago District Lay Leader and she is now the Dean of Faith Alive!; Gail Burgess, new Associate Dean of Faith Alive!; Ron Vinger, Nicolet District Lay Leader and leader for the Fox Valley Walk to Emmaus; Lisa Gilbert, Capital-Coulee Regional Director of Lay Servant Ministries; Ray Cherney, Chippewa-Heartland Regional Director of Lay Servant Ministries; Rex Nelson, Metro North District Director of Lay Servant Ministries; Donna Wilkinson, Nicolet District Director of Lay Servant Ministries; Dorothy Radley, Past Conference Lay Leader; Judy Vasby, President of the Conference United Methodist Women; August Grulich, President of the Conference United Methodist Men (absent); Eric Taylor, Young Adult Representative; and Summer Frosland, Youth Representative. Thank you. You are amazing!

Thank you, Steve Polster and District Superintendents, Rev. Sam Royappa, Rev. Ann Spint-Henschel, Rev. Deborah Thompson, and Rev. Gordon Lind. Thank you all for your commitment and collaborative ministry with the Lay Leader/Lay Member of Annual Conference trainings in all districts in our conference. We encourage all laity and clergy to participate in this training. I extend a particular thank you to Rev Gordon Lind who is the Cabinet Liaison to the Conference

Board of Laity. Thank you for being present, for your counsel, and for being engaged in and supportive of the ministry of the Conference Board of Laity in this Conference throughout the year.

I reserve a special thank you to you, Bishop Jung. Thank you for your great partnership with me and with the Board of Laity. Thank you for your living servant leadership. Thank you for **seeing with your heart's eyes the "child of God" in each of us. I hold dear your uncommon** encouragement, support and advocacy for collaborative ministry with the laity in this Conference. They are spirit filled and ready to produce fruit of the spirit. We are the whole **people of God together...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.** Together we Imagine Wisconsin Anew! Together we go into the future! Thank you.