

## Orientation for New Lay Members of Annual Conference - 2014

So, you've been chosen to be a Lay Member of Annual Conference. Congratulations! Annual Conference is a very rich experience: worship, fellowship, learning, and of course the business of the Conference. We use the words "Annual Conference" in two different ways. An Annual Conference is a unique geographical area of the United Methodist Church; it is a unit of the UMC, not the local church. In our case, the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference includes all of Utah, all of Colorado, and the eastern part of Wyoming. Bishop Elaine Stanovsky is our Bishop, our Episcopal leader. She is also assigned to the Yellowstone Conference, which includes the western part of Wyoming, all of Montana, and a piece of Idaho. The two Conferences together make up the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area. Rocky Mountain Conference is divided into six geographic Districts, each with their own leadership structure. We share resources and policies across the Conference and sometimes with Yellowstone Annual Conference.

Annual Conference is also used to refer to the annual meeting of the lay and clergy in a geographic area. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church says that the purpose of an 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." The Book of Discipline outlines in some detail those who are eligible to be members of annual conference. There must be an equal number of lay and clergy members of an annual conference. Some of you were elected by your local churches; each church is entitled to one lay member for each assigned clergy. In Rocky Mountain Conference, there are many clergy who are members of Annual Conference but not under appointment to a local church; some are retired, some are appointed to Extension Ministries or Agencies beyond the local church. Many of you are therefore what we call "Equalization Members," who were chosen according to our formula to equalize lay and clergy membership of the Annual Conference.

One of the important means of grace in the Wesleyan tradition is "Christian conferencing," opportunities to join with others for worship, fellowship, and for ministry. John Wesley established an annual conference in 1744. Minutes of that first conference show that after praying together, three topics were considered: what to teach, how to teach, and what to do. Bishop Schnase, in his book Seven Levers, says that we gather in conference sessions to "reconfirm who we are, what we do, and why it matters." In the words of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And are we yet alive?" And so at business sessions of Annual Conference (called plenaries), we will elect people to various offices and boards, Committees, we will consider legislation, we will vote on a budget, appointments for pastors will be confirmed, reports will be given to show how we have been at work in mission and ministry. But Annual Conference is more than that; it is a place and time to come together to consider who we are as United Methodists, what God is calling us to do, and what difference we can make in the world.

What is the role of a Member of Annual Conference? First is preparation. Talk with your pastor and others who have been Clergy or Lay Members of Annual Conference to find out how Annual Conference operates. Encourage all in your church or community to come together to discuss what will be happening at Annual Conference this year. It is always good to attend the spring District Meetings to learn what is being emphasized this year. Study the pre-conference materials published on-line: the proposed legislation, the schedule, special events and meals. Read Bishop Elaine's blog on the Sand Creek Massacre. Consider what it means to be in "Healing Relationships." Special meals are an excellent time for fellowship with different

groups. Some meals will feature a speaker, and others, like the Lay Awards Luncheon, will highlight the work of laity in the conference. You do need to register ahead of time for Special Meals. Note the Legislative Group to which you have been assigned and pay particular attention to the petitions before that group. Each group typically has three or four petitions. You may need to know content of all petitions, as they may be brought before the entire Conference, so read through all of them.

While at Annual Conference, plan to attend and participate in all sessions. Be sure to come well rested! Annual Conference begins with the Bishop's Episcopal Address. We will have a Memorial Service and Communion the first evening. This year we have a very unusual experience, with Friday being given over to a Pilgrimage to the site of the Sand Creek Massacre. Saturday will be reports, legislation, Clergy and Laity sessions. Sunday morning will include worship and Ordination, always a moving service. You are a Voting Member of Annual Conference. You do not have to vote the same as other members of your church, and you may abstain if you do not feel qualified to vote on a particular issue. Remember to take notes, to write your reflections, to observe legislation that would impact your congregation's finances and ministry.

If you are an Equalization Member, note that you may receive a rebate on the registration cost if you turn in a form saying that you will attend all sessions. Forms are available online and at the Lay Session and must be turned in during the Lay Session.

According to our Conference Rules, there will be a Lay Leader election this year, for a four-year term. The election was announced in the Conference news and with the Annual Conference information; application forms were online and were due by April 10. According to our Conference Rules, no campaigning is allowed. There will be no nominations from the floor. Election will be held during the Lay Session. Next year there will be election of Lay Delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

Bring money or a credit card to Annual Conference! Cokesbury usually has a display at Annual Conference and it's a good time to browse through resources. There are always displays from many groups associated with the Conference and you will want to take time to go through the display tables and talk to hosts. Some will have items for sale to benefit their particular mission or interest. Explore the resource displays to gather information and ideas for ministry in your congregation.

Your responsibilities continue after Annual Conference. You are asked to give a report to your congregation and to report to the church council. You, or at least one Lay Member from your congregation, are expected to be on your Administrative Council to represent the voice of Annual Conference and the wider church. You may be asked to explain apportionments or special Conference emphases. You will bring a broader perspective of the United Methodist Church, our structure and our mission, to your local church. After your experience at Annual Conference, you may decide you would like to give your name to the Conference Committee on Nominations, and become more involved in the work of the Conference.

Thank you for saying "yes" to your Nominating Committee! May God enrich you through the experiences and the people of Rocky Mountain Annual Conference. We look forward to meeting you and to being in fellowship with you.

Margaret Hotze, RMC Co Lay Leader

Resource: "Guidelines: Lay Leader, Lay Member," Sandy Jackson, GBOD, available at Cokesbury.