



The United Methodist Church

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Episcopal Statement Re: NIC Future

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted, postponed, canceled, called into question, and overall has changed so many aspects of our lives. Planning for the future—even just weeks out—is precarious at best and for those of us who plan almost every waking moment, it is particularly a challenge! I've never liked these verses from James, but I've felt their impact during this time:

“You don't really know about tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for only a short while before it vanishes. Here's what you ought to say: 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'” James 4:14-15 (CEB)

We all know now that the General Conference is postponed until Aug. 29 – Sept. 7, 2021. The Jurisdictional Conference will be held Nov. 8-15, 2021 with official business conducted Nov. 10-12, 2021.

Given the state's current orders on gatherings not to exceed 50 people until there is a vaccine and/or treatment for COVID-19, the decision has been made to hold a **virtual clergy session on Monday, June 29, 10 am to 12 noon**. The clergy session will vote on all essential matters related to clergy, including those who were approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry for commissioning and ordination as well as those who will be retiring. Registration for the clergy session will be available soon; you must register in order to get the zoom link and attend.

We will also have a virtual annual conference session in the fall (we are currently planning for Nov.), which will be conducted for essential business only, meaning only those things that we need to approve going into 2021. No extra legislation will be presented. The virtual annual conference session will be preceded by communications—such as webinars, videos, flyers and papers—that will explain conference business (such as the budget) and include presentations like the lay and episcopal addresses. And hopefully we'll find a way to honor those being commissioned, ordained, retired, and memorialized both prior to the virtual annual conference and at a later time when we are able to meet in person again.

As many of you know, I was scheduled to retire September 1, 2020. After a great deal of discernment and consultation with the NIC Episcopacy Committee, the chair of the North Central Jurisdiction (NCJ) Committee on Episcopacy, the College of Bishops (the North Central Jurisdiction bishops), the Cabinet, and last (but not least), my husband, **I will retire effective January 1, 2021**. My personal plans as well as my assignment as the Ecumenical Officer for the Council of Bishops were all pretty advanced in their implementation prior to the postponements in the general church.

The College of Bishops has the responsibility of assigning episcopal coverage under these circumstances and have already begun discerning what type of episcopal coverage there will be for



the NIC during most of 2021 prior to the Jurisdictional Conference when the NCJ Committee on Episcopacy will assign a bishop (which is the normal process). Representatives from the NCJ Committee on Episcopacy and College of Bishops have already met with the NIC Episcopacy Committee. They will report the plan for episcopal coverage in Northern Illinois later this summer.

Virtual meetings allow us to do our work, but as the body of Christ we are, if you will, “incarnational:” meaning that it is in being together that we experience the presence of Christ in our midst in a uniquely palpable way—like those who walked to Emmaus and broke bread with the risen Christ. This is not to minimize the profound and meaningful experiences happening online during the past two months. For that matter, I can’t quite imagine what it would have been like to go through this without the benefit of the Internet and technology!

One day we will yet meet again. For centuries since Charles Wesley wrote the hymn “And Are We Yet Alive,” it’s been sung particularly when the clergy gather at annual conference after a year apart. Admittedly, it’s sometimes sung like a dirge, but maybe it’s because the gravity of the recognition of all that can and has gone on since we were last together. Its words, particularly the first line and the third verse, have haunted me as all these “holy conferencing” events are postponed:

“And are we yet alive, and see each other’s face?

What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past,
fightings without, and fears within, since we assembled last!”

In the meantime, when we see each other’s faces on Zoom, we rejoice that we are yet alive: worshipping, being in mission, giving, and supporting one another, our local churches and the annual conference.

Be safe! Be smart! Be healthy! You’re in my prayers!



Bishop Sally Dyck