

LAITY ADDRESS: ANNUAL CONFERENCE JUNE 4, 2018

Good afternoon, Northern Illinois Annual Conference! My name is Mark Manzi and I serve as one of your co-conference Lay Leaders. It is my privilege today to present to you the 2018 Laity Address. First, however, let me introduce my colleagues co-conference Lay Leaders, Jessie Cunningham and Elisa Gatz.

We are pleased and humbled to serve and represent you. One of the ways we represent you is to attend and act for you on many different conference committees. Jessie serves on the Board of Ordained Ministry, Episcopacy Committee, and Nominations Committee. Elisa serves on the Episcopacy Committee and chairs the General Conference Delegation. I serve on the Annual Conference Committee and the Annual Conference Shepherding Team. While we attend many conference-wide committee meetings, the most important committee for us and the one we all serve on is the Board of Laity. This is at the heart of what we do and thus important for us as your co-conference lay leaders. We want you to know the members of the Board of Laity. At this time, I would like all members of the Board of Laity to stand and raise a hand as you are introduced:

Aurora District Co-Lay Leaders - Greg Chapman and Larry Newton

Chicago Northwest Co-Lay Leaders - Donna Sagami and Vivian Matthews

Chicago Southern Co-Lay Leaders - John Abney and Dawn Shires

DeKalb Co-Lay Leaders - Chad Abell, Karen Bonnell and Tom Weber

Elgin Lay Leader - Kathy Dickerson

Rockford Co-Lay Leaders - John Aten and Denzil Winter

United Methodist Women's President - Lois Moreland Dean

United Methodist Men's President - George Groves

Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries - Peggy Hansen

Members at large - Rose Faulkner, Gerald Hayes, and

Joanne Mendicino. Joanne will be cycling off of the Board of Laity this year and we want to give her a special (thank-you) for her service.

Finally, we have

Rev. Char Hoffmann - our Clergy representative and

Rev. Arlene Christopherson - the Director of Connectional Ministries.

The Board of Laity's WHY is to provide support and direction for the ministry of the laity on the local, district, and conference level. Our HOW is through building relationships and connections with local church leaders and clergy for equipping and empowering them for ministry. When you hear the words WHY and HOW in that statement, I hope many of you remember that those words were the focus of the last two Laity Convocations. We spoke of us, laity and clergy, as individuals as well as together in our churches needing to determine and understand our WHY. Why do we do what we do? At the first Laity Convocation and here at Annual Conference last year we saw a video of Michael Jr. talk about the importance of knowing our WHY. Michael Jr. said, "When you know your 'Why,' your 'What' has more impact, because you're walking in or towards your purpose." That is what the Board of Laity is trying to do and we hope we are always walking towards our purpose of building relationship in order to help equip and empower the ministry of the laity.

At this year's Laity Convocation, we went from WHY to HOW. Rev. Junius Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries was our keynote speaker and he honed in on the WHY and then moved to the HOW in order to make our WHY a reality. He focused on explaining the importance of knowing our WHY as he described HOW to develop an intentional discipleship system which is a focal point for Discipleship Ministries. Along with being inspired by Rev. Dotson's keynote, we also attended one of four break-out sessions where presenters from our conference told of their WHY and HOW in the ministry work they were doing and gave us specific strategies for transforming ministry plans and putting them into action.

Beyond working to equip and empower church leaders for ministry, the goal of the Laity Convocation is to bring laity from across our diverse conference together to help build stronger relationships. No matter where our churches are, rural, suburban, or urban, we are United Methodists and we are connected. We serve the same God and have many of the same challenges but when we use our connections and our relationships, we can work together to overcome those challenges. We can learn new ideas for doing ministry from each other and have resource persons available to share and get help with those ideas.

Annual Conference is a great place to continue to build our relationships. I encourage lay and clergy members to reach out and speak with any of the members of the Board of Laity. Tell us what is working in your churches. Tell us about your challenges and concerns. We want to hear from you, answer your questions, celebrate what is going well and help with your challenges. We don't have all the answers, but we may be able to point you in the right direction to the right connection.

We are pleased to announce that Laity Convocation 2019 will be held on Saturday, February 9th and want you to put this date on your calendars now and share the date with other leaders at your local churches. One focus of the 2019 Laity Convocation will be the power of prayer with keynote speaker Susan Nilson Kibbey who is the director of Connectional Ministries in the West Ohio Conference. She has just written a book titled Flood Gates: Holy Momentum for a Fearless church which uses experience-based research about how a congregation can make the shift from plateau or even decline-to opening the flood gates of spiritual upsurge. Our second focus will be to provide up-to-date information on the Way Forward and what will be happening at the special general conference in St. Louis on February 23 - 26, 2019. We will be in small groups, for a discussion about the Way Forward.

I don't know about all of you, but I am a planner. It helps me to know where I am going and what I am supposed to be doing. When my wife and I go on vacation, we have fairly precise plans. While there is some room for serendipity, I generally have the Google maps ready, the tickets purchased, dinner reservations set, and well, you get the picture.

When I as a younger man and a new member at St. Andrew UMC in Carol Stream where my wife and I still attend, the new pastor, Rev. Elmer Dickson, tapped me to be the senior high youth leader. I was a middle school teacher in town and he thought that would be a good fit for me. So, I volunteered. Together, we led several youth trips. The first trip was to the Boundary Waters in Canada where we encountered some uncharted waters. Uncharted waters, at least to us. A couple of year's later we took another group of youth to Nashville which included visiting a number of United Methodist sites as well as using our connection to sleep in a large United Methodist church in Nashville. Camping in a state park was also a part of the trip. We concluded the Nashville part of the trip and were on our way to the state park and our camp site for the night. The time to the camp ground was a little longer than expected and it got dark and then it began to rain. And, then it REALLY started to rain. To tell you the truth, not only was it raining, but we weren't exactly sure where we were in proximity to the camp ground. As we drove along, Elmer and I were talking about the situation as we came upon a town. As we drove into the town, we knew what to do. We went into the local grocery store and found a pay phone and guess who we called. Yes, we used our connection again and called the local United Methodist church parsonage. Elmer talked to the pastor of the church and wahla we had an invitation to stay in the basement of the church for the night - out of the rain.

We had a van full of senior high youth who were tired and we weren't sure where we were. It was raining. We didn't have GPS or a cell phone. Those things weren't invented yet. We were in un-

charted waters. We were concerned, but we didn't "freak out." We remembered our connection and used that connection to get us to the next morning which turned out to be a beautiful and sunny day, allowing us time to get our bearings and move forward.

For a planner, however, not knowing where you are and being in uncharted waters, can be a little disconcerting, but I have heard, that while the time in uncharted waters may be challenging, this time may also be an opportunity. An opportunity to take time to really examine ourselves and uncover both the strengths and weaknesses we have. Hopefully, we come to the realization that we all, laity and clergy, are part of those strengths and a part of the way forward through our weaknesses. The type of leadership needed for this time, however, may be different from what we normally use.

Rev. Susan Beaumont is a well known expert in the field of adaptive leadership. Susan was our presenter and guide on adaptive leadership during a one-day conference held on March 10th of this year that was attended by both the Annual Conference Shepherding Team and members of each of our six District Shepherding Teams. She began the day by introducing us to a word I had never heard before - liminality. Liminality is occupying a position on both sides of a threshold. Liminality is a time when something has ended, but something new is not ready to begin. As I thought about liminality, a time when one thing is ending but the next thing is not ready to begin, I thought about the year before I retired. I was happy in my career as a middle school principal. I was in a good school. I had an excellent understanding of what my job was and what we needed to do to continually move things forward. The time, however, to move on to something new was coming. I realized that I had been returning to school every September for the last fifty years. My time as a middle school principal was ending. What would retirement look like? What was I going to do? I had ideas, but would those ideas be enough? Had we saved enough? I believed we had, but the way forward was still not fully developed. A time of liminality?

Susan told us that leadership in a time of liminality is leading when we don't know where we are going. You all remember I said I am a planner. I didn't want to hear this. How can I lead if I don't know where we are going. How could I plan for that? Why couldn't she just tell us what we needed to do to find out where we are going and what we needed to do to get to get going?

Guess what, Susan's next words were even less encouraging. She told us that the default position of the church in times of liminality is to tell people don't worry - be happy. She indicated that as church leaders, we usually work to restore equilibrium. We usually return to the status quo. O.K., what is wrong with that? I think you, as did I, know what was wrong with that and data backs up our think-

ing. Data tells us those things usually don't work out. When we restore equilibrium, we really go backwards into our comfort zone, we make few, if any, changes and so the challenges usually remain and generally get worse.

Susan told us that times of liminality is really a time when leaders need to heat things up. That times of liminality are times to tell people what they **NEED** to hear instead of what they **WANT** to hear. Oh, I love doing that. She said that times of liminality are times to look for the adaptive work that needs to be done, not the technical work we think will solve the challenge. Why? Because technical work lives in the head and adaptive work lives in the heart. She told us that times of liminality are times for passion and that there is no reason to exercise leadership unless there is something you care deeply enough about.

What an interesting conclusion. We need passion. We need to exercise leadership for something we care deeply enough about. For me, and I am betting for you, leading to make our churches and our conference stronger and more able to get the message of Jesus to our neighbors, to people in need is something that we care deeply about. I believe that each of you here today cares deeply about your church and wants to lead to help make your church stronger for making disciples for Jesus for the transformation of the world around you.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, experts on adaptive leadership, in their book *Leadership on the Line - Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* tell us this, "Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions. Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community."

I think you realize we are in a time of liminality. Many of the old ways we did church don't work as well today. New people coming into your town aren't just looking for the cross and flame to figure out where they will be going to church if they will be going to church at all. The challenges we have are adaptive challenges. So, if you want to feel comfortable and safe, then this may be the wrong time and the wrong place for you. We all remember, however, that the people in Jesus's time wanted Jesus to be comfortable and safe, but Jesus came to upset things. Jesus challenged cultural norms. He ate with

“sinners” and hung out with social outcasts. He envisioned a new way to look at religion. Hear what Jesus said, as interpreted by the Message, from Matthew 5;

“Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look: ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: ‘Don’t hit back at all.’ If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

“You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.”

Don’t hit back. Live generously. Love your friend and your enemy so your best will shine through. Respond with prayer.

Yes, Jesus raised the temperature and challenged the way things were being done. Jesus had new ideas for how the people had to look at the law and reached out to not just some of the people, but to all of the people.

We have a good understanding of many of the technical challenges in our church. We know how to choose the curriculum for vacation Bible school and where to order the materials. We know how to prepare for a worship service. We know whom to call to repair the water heater when it breaks. But the challenges that are before us now, as the challenges that were before Jesus, are more than technical challenges. We are in a time of adaptive challenges and these challenges require different types of solutions. In fact, the challenges we have will take different solutions and they will take time to solve. They will call for experimentation and hanging in there as the experiment may not be the right solution or work the first time. Getting to the best way to move forward will take new discoveries and numerous adjustments.

The good thing is that adaptation relies on diversity and we are a diverse conference. The good thing is that successful adaptive changes build on the past rather than jettisoning them all. But, there will be some modifying or even letting go of that which is no longer needed or useful. We will have to rearrange some of our old DNA.

As a former science teacher, I perked up when someone talks about DNA. Did you know that 97% of a chimpanzee’s DNA is exactly like a human’s DNA? It is that 3%, however, that is the difference, but what a difference it makes. So, the amount of DNA that we need to change may only be 3%, but we must find and change that 3% for in that will be the difference.

Now, before your eyes get too glazed over thinking this is overwhelming or this is going to take too long or this is something I have heard before and which never got done, I want to say that we, our conference, has already started working and you have been a part of the work. In 2015, we gathered a great deal of data in a survey of lay and clergy across the conference called Landscape. We compiled and analyzed that data and had multiple laity and clergy listening sessions across the conference to discuss the data. We used the Landscape data and the information gathered from the listening sessions to determine what people were saying and created a new mission and vision statement for our conference. We also created a statement of our values. We have used this data and our new mission, vision, and values statements to guide our work.

Last year, we moved forward again. We, the Annual Conference, approved new teams to continue the work. These are the Annual Conference Shepherding Team and the six District Shepherding Teams. These teams will take new responsibilities for some of the work of the conference and district. These teams have specific responsibilities including being a leading and learning organization in addressing the technical and adaptive challenges of the NIC, providing coordination of the ministry, mission and vision of the NIC, discerning a five-year vision plan, and focusing NIC resources to equip local churches and ministry settings to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. These teams have a diverse make-up including excellent representation by the laity of the conference to help make these and other responsibilities a reality for our conference.

We have begun learning about adaptive leadership and are currently working on discerning a five-year vision plan for the conference.

We are just beginning. We will work diligently. We will report to you annually.

Through this time in liminality where the outcomes are not yet clear nor is the path yet charted, church ministry will continue. That may be challenging at times. This short video may give you an idea of what this time might look like.

I love it - it's 60 below, it's brisk. I guess you can call 60 below brisk. O.K., we won't be building airplanes in the sky, but it might seem like it. More importantly is Why, why do they build airplanes in the sky? They do it because of the people. They are creating a new place. They are building a dream. I first saw this video clip at Jurisdictional Conference in 2008 when the Bishop of Minnesota, yes, Bishop Sally, used it as the opening of the sermon she was giving. I used it with teachers to start a school year. Because it also spoke to me of needing to create and do new things while the plane, while the school, while the church, while conference, keeps on going. We must note that as we are working on the

adaptive challenges to rebuild our conference, our conference is still in the air. It is still moving. We will keep on having church and doing ministry. We will continue to work to meet the needs of our neighbors. How do I know that?

The Annual Conference Shepherding Team meets throughout the conference. Our April meeting was at the Rochelle UMC. At that meeting, we began what we hope will be an ongoing part of each of our meetings. After the formal meeting concluded, we met with laity from the area to discuss the joys and concerns of the ministry in their area. At Rochelle, we met with seven lay persons and were thrilled to hear about the activity of the Hub Cluster and the Rochelle UMC outreach to Central School.

The Hub Cluster is a lay-led and directed cluster that joins several small churches of the area together to do ministry that alone they could not do. The idea and work began in 2006 with a mission trip to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. They continue to do mission trips both locally and nationally. They have worship services together such as their recent Good Friday service. They support each other's church fundraisers. Individually, they said they could do perhaps only a quarter or closer to an eighth as individual churches as compared to what they do together. I would like to thank Dan and Linda Graber and Ed and Karen Baylor for telling us about the wonderful ministry the Hub Cluster is doing in the Rochelle area.

Rochelle UMC has recognized that the population of Rochelle is changing and they wanted to be on the forefront of working with their new neighbors. They didn't have much practice dealing in multicultural environments, but that didn't stop them. They recognized that the demographics of the school across the street had changed from predominantly white to 80% Hispanic and that many of the children were on the Federal free or reduced price lunch program. They wanted to help. They first reached out in 2016 to the teachers with welcome signs and greetings as well as coffee on the first day of school. This led to quarterly times for coffee. But, one thing that I believe really moved the needle, so to say, was when the church posted friendly greetings in both English and Spanish in the big window that faced the school. The teachers and students responded with their own greetings in their classroom windows and the match was made. The 2017 school year ended with an end of the year party that the church thought would have perhaps 20 families attend. All 250 families of the school attended. Thanks goes to Mary Ellen Taylor, Bobbi Wyss, Don Horner, Dana Cox, and pastor Rob Hamilton for telling us about this outstanding ministry and for recognizing the changes taking place in their community and reaching out to be a light to all who call Rochelle home.

These are just some examples of the ministry that is taking place throughout our conference. As the Annual Conference Shepherding Team meets across the conference, I am sure we will be hearing of other ministries that are reaching out to and meeting the needs of our neighbors.

I don't have pictures of the Sunday worship that is happening throughout our conference, but I know that worship is happening every Sunday and many churches are having worship on Saturday and other days of the week as well. Ministry and worship and potlucks and chicken dinners, cornfests, bazaars, and many other things will continue to happen throughout our conference through this liminal time.

But, we are in Uncharted Waters, we are a work in progress. Somethings may change, as they always do or end as they also do, but other things will begin. Jesus came to heat things up. Jesus recognized that meeting the needs of the people as they were in their current situation is what was vital. Change is a challenge. Not being sure of where we are going is a challenge, but we have a process in place. We are moving forward. We have strong connections and vital relationships. And most of all, we know that God will always be with us.

Now before I finish, may I take a moment and talk about the Royal Wedding? Come on, I know a number of you here today watched. But, I don't really want to talk about all of the pomp and circumstance or St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. I want to talk about the wedding sermon given by the Most Rev. Michael Curry - the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church of America. He spoke of love. Now, speaking of love at a wedding isn't unusual. I would say that we all talk about love at a wedding, but Bishop Curry had a little more time and a world-wide audience and he delved into love a little more deeply.

He first quoted Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who said...
“We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world. Love is the only way.” He told those gathered for this wedding about the power of love. Not just of the love the wedding couple had for each other, but the love that we all need.

Rev. Curry reminded us that Jesus may have begun the most revolutionary movement in human history and I quote, “a movement ground on the unconditional love of God for the world and a movement mandating people to live and love. And in so doing, to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself!” He said he was talking about the power, the real power of love, the power in love to change the world. Do we think this way when we talk about love? We say we want to make disciples

for Jesus Christ for the transformation of world. In fact, this is our mission and I would guess that sometimes we say these words probably not really believing that we can change the world. This message was saying to use the power of love to start the change.

I use these words from Bishop Curry to end. “Think and imagine a world where love is the way. Imagine our homes and families when love is the way. Imagine our neighborhoods and communities where love is the way... Imagine this tired old world when love is the way. When love is the way - unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive - when love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream, and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.

When love is the way, poverty would become history, When love is the way, the Earth will be sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay our swords and shields down by the riverside to study war no more. When love is the way, there’s plenty of room for all of God’s children. When love is the way, we actually treat each other, well, like we are actually family. When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters and children of God.”

All of this may sound impossible, but this kind of love is in our control and in our DNA. We are a people of faith and the impossible may sound impossible to others but to those that have faith? Let’s start imagining. Let’s start and make love the way. It has to start somewhere, why can’t it start with me - with us.

God is with us. Yes, the love of God is with us as we move through the Uncharted Waters, as we work to reorganize ourselves in this conference. The love of God is with us as we find a way forward. Don’t give up. Don’t forget. Imagine the love. Remember God is love. Hang In There!