

The Role of the Lay Member of Annual Conference

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Lay members of annual conference, along with the pastor, interpret the work done by the annual conference session to the congregation. They are the liaison between the congregation and the general church and represent the congregation in the actions taken at the annual conference sessions. The *Discipline* requires that lay members of annual conference be professing members of the United Methodist Church for two years preceding their election and active participants in The United Methodist Church for at least four years before their election (§ 602.4).

The lay member

- Participates in the annual conference sessions and votes on all matters except those pertaining to ministerial relations.
- Reports to the congregation *in the week following the annual conference session and to the church council at its next meeting after the close of the conference session*. The *Discipline* states that the report to the church council must be within three months of the close of the session.
- Interprets actions taken at annual conference.
- Serves as a member of the staff/pastor-parish relations committee, church council, and finance committee.

You and the other lay members to annual conference will be serving with an equal number of clergy members. This is an opportunity to listen and learn from each other and to experience a greater variety of God's human creation than you may experience in your local congregation. You will meet and work with people from different size churches; various cultures; urban, rural, and suburban congregations; and a wide variety of professions, life experience, and economic levels. Take advantage of this opportunity by getting acquainted with people sitting near you. Celebrate the diversity of The United Methodist Church!

Annual conference covers a time span of three to five days, and generally meets in June. The bishop may occasionally call extra sessions if there is emergent business. Your pastor or district superintendent can inform you about meeting dates, or you can check the annual conference website (www.awfumc.org).

Responsibilities of the Lay Member

The lay member to annual conference has many responsibilities, some before the annual conference session, others during, and still more following the session. If you are employed, you will have to take time from work to attend these gatherings. When the dates are announced, take care to plan with your employer for the necessary days of vacation. It is important that you attend the entire annual conference session.

PREPARE FOR THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Study the pre-conference journal and materials that are submitted for action by the annual conference. These materials may be mailed to you several weeks before annual conference or may be available on the annual conference website (www.awfumc.org).

To prepare, you should:

- Attend any pre-conference district meetings and training sessions.
- Discover your annual conference process for conducting business. For example, some conferences operate with Robert's Rules of Order (parliamentary procedure); other conferences operate with discernment processes and consensus. Your pastor or annual conference office can help you prepare before your first session.
- Develop a general knowledge of the *Book of Discipline*.

- Meet with the pastor, lay leader, and congregation members to discuss issues that will be a part of the annual conference business.
- Note issues and concerns that need to be taken to the annual conference session.

PARTICIPATE DURING ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- Attend the annual conference laity session. This may be a training event, a form of information sharing, or a time to celebrate the ministry of the laity in your annual conference.
- Participate in all sessions dealing with annual conference business. During business sessions, you will be asked to vote on legislation, resolutions, reports, and budget.
- Listen to proceedings in order to make informed decisions when voting. You do not have to vote the same as other members from your congregation, and you may abstain if you do not feel qualified to vote on a particular issue. You must hold in mind the tension between the ministry of the Church in the world and the interests of your own congregation. Sometimes you might choose to vote for the “greater good” on issues that may (or may not) have a direct impact on your congregation and issues that may even increase your local church budget. Examples might be an increase in budget for mission work, work to curb violence that is not part of your local community, a position on a social issue on which all members of your congregation do not agree. In these instances, you have the role of explaining and educating your congregation about the issues.
- Participate in all worship experiences (opening worship, early morning or evening chapel, ordination, memorial service, and others). You will have opportunities to experience several worship styles, hear a variety of music groups and preachers, and join in new ways to worship God.
- Attend plenary and Bible study sessions. Annual conference sessions can be an excellent way to grow spiritually.
- Explore the resource display to gather information and ideas for ministry in your congregation. During fellowship events, at display tables, and in casual conversation you will learn about The United Methodist Church in new ways. Participate fully with anticipation of new ways God might come to you.

A spiritual discipline for conference is journaling! Write your reflections about proceedings, discussions, worship experiences, special ceremonies, music, and so on as preparation for later sharing with your congregation. Keep an accurate record of the votes taken that will have impact on the congregation’s finances, operations, and ministry.

SERVE AFTER ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Attendance at the annual conference session is the basis for the work you will do in your congregation throughout the year.

- Share information with your congregation about your experience. Remember that the report to the congregation is to be given within the following week and the report to the church council at the next meeting or no later than three months after the annual conference session.
- Search websites and general Church news sources and your annual conference newspaper for information to share with your congregation throughout the year.
- You may also choose to participate in annual conference or district committees or work areas.

You can find additional information on the following website:

<http://www.gbod.org/laity>

Go to “Communication Tools for Lay Members to Annual Conference” and also “The Things I learned at Annual Conference”