

East Central District Lay Leader Report for ECD Annual Conference
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I come to you with greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Redeemer. To all clergy and laity in the East Central District of the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church I am happy to give you this annual report from your East Central District Lay Leader. Not only are we all dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, but there is much change happening in our own Iowa Conference and in the United Methodist Church. I would like to say here and now that I subscribe to focusing on a model of abundance rather than a model of scarcity. Yes, many people are facing great challenges and our Conference is facing many budgetary constraints, but there is much to celebrate and wonderful ways to move forward.

Since last District Conference, as your East Central District Lay Leader I have been working hard to get to know people in the district and to hear how churches are fairing over the past year. I have taken an active role to help with trainings and systems that can help support our churches moving forward. I would like to report today on several key areas related to laity and the work we do with our pastors and church leadership.

Areas Covered In This Report:

- 1) Iowa Conference Board of Laity
- 2) School for Lay Ministry
- 3) East Central District Operational Team
- 4) Unified and Matthew 25 Grant Programs
- 5) January 2020 Sunday Trainings for Lay Leadership and Administrative Council Members
- 6) Visiting Churches throughout the East Central District since beginning of October 2019

Iowa Conference Board of Laity

The Board of Laity at the conference level has been organizing and trying to find ways for laity to make a difference in the Iowa Conference and to help local churches in a myriad of ways. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 many plans were cancelled for large events that the Board of Laity were to participate in. Laity Day with the Bishop at the start of April 2020 was cancelled, but will come back next year and there will be dynamic and informative sessions as well as fantastic worship experiences. Since the Annual Conference will not be coming together and will take on a different virtual format this year, it means the Laity Session and programming put on by the Board of Laity will be cancelled and we will find other ways to assist churches and encourage lay leadership. Look for communications from the Iowa Conference and the East Central District for announcements and other programming that will happen in the future once this COVID-19 crisis is over. Margaret Borgen, was recently re-elected to another term as our Iowa Conference Lay Leader and Chair of the Board of Laity. The Board of Laity does fully support the School for Lay Ministry and offers scholarships and finds ways to help the Deans of both venues to continue their good work. This brings me to my second area.

School for Lay Ministry

We are very fortunate to have one of the two venues for School for Lay Ministry here in the East Central District. As you know, there are now only two venues - Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, IA and also at the Iowa UMC Center in Des Moines, IA. Lynn Calvert is the Dean of the Cornell College School for Lay Ministry and also serves on the Board of Laity as President of United Methodist Women. I am a graduate myself of the School for Lay Ministry and believe it to be a life-changing and simply amazing experience to develop leaders in our churches. I believe it would do anyone good to attend School for Lay Ministry and it truly helps you with your spiritual formation and development. I have presented a PowerPoint at my own home church, First United Methodist Church of Iowa City, to help recruit new students and I also mentor a current student. I will be happy to share any information I have to help those who are interested. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 the spring classes for School for Lay Ministry were cancelled. It is the plan to continue classes in the fall as long as it is safe to do so. Starting last fall, the East Central District now offers all laity who are members of churches in the East Central District scholarships to School of Lay Ministry on top of any you may receive from the Board of Laity. I helped enable this action to happen and wrote the draft for the application. It is another way that the East Central District is able to continue supporting the efforts of laity to become better leaders in their churches and to promote the importance of School for Lay Ministry. You can check out the East Central District website to find the application for School for Lay Ministry Scholarship and you can also get Board of Laity scholarship application on the Iowa Conference website under School for Lay Ministry.

East Central District Operational Team

I have been part of the ECD Operational Team for some time now. I am one of two original members still participating when the SLI (Spiritual Leadership, Inc). process started in the Districts. We use the L3 model (Loving, Learning, Leading) in order to deal with adaptive change and the operational team has worked closely with the DS to support and provide communication, informational resources, and leadership development within the district. The ECD Operational Team is now in its second formation and there are basically six of us who had been meeting the second Saturday of the month from approximately 9am-3pm. We were meeting monthly until March 2020. With the future unknown since the number of districts will be reduced in the conference and we will be moving towards circuits throughout the conference, the needs and purpose of the District Operational Teams will change and/or may be eliminated. It has been a great honor for me to serve with my other team members and we have gotten very close as brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope that our work has been of some benefit to the district, and I am anxious to see what the future holds for the conference and how district work will be accomplished under new models.

Unified and Matthew 25 Grant Programs

This year I had the honor of chairing the grants committee for the Unified and Matthew 25 Grant programs. It is a small committee that worked very hard this year doing site visits and coming together to make tough decisions. I have served on the committee for a few years now and had been the co-chair of the committee last year, but with pastoral changes in the district it was left

for me to be the single chair. There were only two applications for the Unified Grant Program, and while it was too bad that there were only two, we were able to fund both very qualified applications from the North Liberty Community Pantry and St. Paul's African National Ministries in Cedar Rapids. Then for the Matthew 25 Grant program we had nine wonderful grant applications. As you already may know, the Matthew 25 grant program has less money to give out than the Unified Grant Program and there were very difficult decisions that had to be made given that the pool of applicants were all very worthy. After prayerful consideration grant amount recommendations were given to the DS and conference in November 2019. The nine organizations receiving funding through Matthew 25 include Iowa JFON #375, St. Mark's UMC, Family Promise of Linn County, Coralville Community Food Pantry, Hillcrest Family Services, Life Connections Peer Recovery Services, Matthew 25 in Cedar Rapids, North Liberty Community Pantry, and Women at the Well. Congratulations to all of the organizations from both grant programs! We could always use more people to serve on the District Grants Committee and if you are interested please contact me at mmpetkewec@gmail.com. The future for these grant programs is uncertain given the Conference budget concerns so please continue to follow the Iowa Conference website and District websites for updates and information.

January 2020 Sunday Trainings for Lay Leadership and Administrative Council Members

The Rev. Kiboko Kiboko who is our DS for the East Central District had a wonderful idea to provide leadership development in some key areas of church management. This was an outgrowth of some of the work the ECD Operational Team was doing over the past year. Many churches do not have a firm grasp of some of the duties and responsibilities that lay leaders, finance committee members, administrative council members, and SPRC members have in their local churches. The ECD Operational Team and even the Board of Laity at the Iowa Conference level have seen our churches struggle with finding people in local churches to fulfill roles and then when they are fulfilled many people are not sure exactly what they should do to work successfully in their roles. While leadership development has always been something that districts throughout the Iowa Conference have handled in various ways, Rev. Kiboko felt we could do something very proactive this year. For four Sundays in January 2020, trainings were offered in four sites throughout the district including Williamsburg, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, and Dubuque. I joined in the effort and provided trainings in lay leadership and administrative council membership while others such as Rev. Kiboko and the Rev. Paul Wilcox provided training in SPRC membership and Finance Committee membership. RSVP's were not strong for Clinton and Dubuque so Rev. Kiboko went to those venues by himself. More people ended up attending those sessions than expected and we learned that we need to come to a venue fully staffed even without strong RSVP's. We had very strong turnouts in Williamsburg and Cedar Rapids, and I was honored to meet many hard-working, dedicated, and caring laity who wanted guidance on how to make their roles as lay leaders and administrative council members stronger. I even gave out sample job descriptions to help provide a template to begin conversations back at their home churches. As I have traveled the district to various churches, I have met many people who attended the trainings and they were gracious to say that the sessions and materials provided were helpful. We hope to provide more leadership development opportunities in the future and the ECD Leadership Development Committee, of which I am a member, is looking for ways to provide virtual trainings in the future given this

COVID-19 crisis situation. Please look for announcements and updates on the District website and in emails throughout the coming months.

Visiting Churches throughout the East Central District since beginning of October 2019

Lastly, I want to report on something that has been very near and dear to my heart. Starting the first week in October 2019, my wife, Megan, and I committed to going to a different church every Sunday throughout the East Central District. It can be tough to miss out on your home church activities and worship experiences, but we do not regret making this decision and it has done us a world of good. There are many churches in our district and we knew it would be more than a year-long commitment. I felt it would be good to start getting to know laity and pastors better throughout the district and to see how things were going during these times of great change we are experiencing in our denomination and the Iowa Conference since the decisions made at the General Conference last year. Many issues have come up in our visits to East Central District churches such as budget constraints, apportionments, human sexuality, church attendance, communication problems, enlisting youth, understanding the Iowa Conference changes and priorities, District support and needs, and other social justice issues throughout the state and nation. At each church we have formally introduced ourselves and have joined in fellowship following the service. It has also been great to tour the facilities we have visited as well. One highlight for us was when we were visiting the Maquoketa UMC we served communion and that was a great blessing. Unfortunately, we had to stop our visiting of churches in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 crisis. What we have done now instead is to watch various live streams of church services throughout the conference since there is a wonderful listing of online services provided by the Conference website.

While our churches are facing many difficulties, changes, and obstacles, my wife and I have noticed many more positive and loving aspects that unite us. We have seen and experienced great strengths and wonderful worships throughout the East Central District. Our churches are filled with people who truly care about God and their communities. The church members are working very hard to make a difference in the lives of many. People are also trying hard to understand and cope with the changes and hard times all while keeping deep faith in the Lord. My wife and I have truly loved every minute we have been out on the road visiting churches and can't wait to get back out there when we are able to have face-to-face church services again. In the meantime, know that your East Central District Lay Leader is praying for you and hoping that your faith remains strong. We can and will all prevail and unite as Christians to overcome any obstacles if we remain true to the path of our Lord and Savior. I will see you online or I will see you in your churches. God Bless and Peace to you all. If you have any questions or would like to chat about anything, please contact me at mmpetkewec@gmail.com.