

Communication Tools for Lay Members to Annual Conference

Lay members to annual conference are elected to represent a congregation in setting the conference's direction for mission and ministry. Each lay member will join other lay and clergy members in a time to worship God, learn about ministry God is calling the church to lead, set direction for the church, meet other United Methodists, and tend to administrative matters for ministry. The lay member has a responsibility to inform others in the local church about the experience. Here are some tools that will help.

1. **Pre-Conference Journal** — Preparation for annual conference begins when you receive reports, resolutions, and an agenda packet. In many conferences, this packet is called the *pre-conference journal*. Prepare for the conference session by becoming familiar with the business and issues for the session. Write notes in the margins of the pages as reports are given and action taken. These notes may include results of votes taken on the action presented, who gave the report, and a quote from the speaker. Note those times when you are especially moved, want more information, and feel challenged personally and as a church member. These notes will help you remember details for your report when you get back home. Remember, you are the elected member from your local church; and you are responsible for making connections between your congregation and the decisions made by the larger body of the annual conference. Just as in a family, annual conference decisions are always "we" decisions. "We" decide important issues such as budget, insurance, and the direction our conference should take.
2. **Conference Newspapers** — Before the conference session, church newspapers will report items related to the events of the annual conference. There may be special editions of the conference paper. Some conferences print a daily newsletter during the session to highlight the previous day's events, describe what can be expected that day, report human interest items, and list announcements. If you save these newspapers, they will be valuable resources as you share the news of annual conference back home.
3. **Follow-up News Release** — This Laity Report Form will assist you with the task of reporting. Read the Laity Report Form to ensure that you understand it. The sample report has been prepared so that you can simply fill in the blanks. Of course, you may choose to add sentences or paragraphs. This document requires minimal effort to complete, and you will have a finished report for your local church newsletter and/or your community's newspaper. It also provides the outline for a verbal report. The information you need to fill in the blanks will come during speeches, in sermons, in reports and displays, and in other parts of the annual conference gathering.
4. **Sample Press Release Announcing Clergy Appointment** — Each United Methodist clergyperson is appointed by the bishop for one year at a time. Even if a pastor is returning to your church, he or she is still appointed for the coming year. That is reason enough to take the opportunity to have an announcement in your local newspaper. You have a public relations opportunity for your church. This sample press release will help you fill in the blanks as you visit with your pastor. It is recommended that you attach a photo of the pastor and/or his or her family to accompany this release. (*NOTE: All newspapers have rules about how to present news stories for publication. Please contact your local paper and follow its guidelines and deadlines for submitting articles.*)
5. **Displays and Flyers** — Be sure to visit the display area to enhance your understanding of the ministries of your annual conference and ministries of the church around the world. Displays often have free materials that you can take for displays in your congregation. As lay member to annual conference, you have the opportunity to help members of your local church understand how the United Methodist connection enables their involvement in mission and ministry around the world. You may meet missionaries and church leaders you want to recommend for an invitation to your church.
6. **United Methodist Communications Reports** — Soon after the close of your conference session, the highlights will be posted with reports of other conferences on the official United Methodist website, www.umc.org.
7. **Annual Conference Journal** — Available several weeks after annual conference, the *Conference Journal* contains the minutes of the annual conference session, the reports, a directory of clergy and lay members, a list of boards and agencies, and statistical tables. During annual conference, you will learn how you can obtain a copy. Some annual conferences provide a print copy for a small fee to cover the cost of printing. Other conferences make the journal available electronically.

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— Adapted by Betsey Heavner, Director of Congregational Leader Formation, the General Board of Discipleship, Nashville, Tennessee.

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