

HOLY CONFERENCING IN OUR CHURCHES

GATHERING REFLECTION FOR BELOVED COMMUNITY

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:12-14, The Message

Some or all forms for the church conference must be submitted ahead of time per the specific instructions of the District Superintendent. Also, the District Superintendent must be notified of new candidates for ministry when the church conference schedule is set.

When meeting virtually, a co-host from the leadership of the congregation (lay or clergy) should be assigned to help with the technical aspects like muting, sharing documents on the screen, etc. when possible. If such a person is not available, the presider may bring someone to help with these aspects of the meeting. As the people gather, the presider should instruct them to have bread and juice, or similar items, on hand so that they can participate in holy communion. If people have questions about what to do with leftover juice and bread at the conclusion of the meeting, the leader can instruct them that they may consume the elements or give them back to God's creation.

CALL TO HOLY CONFERENCING AS BELOVED COMMUNITY

Presider: Gracious God, we are gathered by your love;

People: **we are spurred on by your hope,
and energized by your joy.**

Presider: We are your church, called to be your Body,

People: **the Body of Love in this world,
and we give thanks.**

Presider: Not that we have already reached the goal,

People: **but we press on to make it our own
because Christ Jesus has made us his own.**

Presider: We give thanks for our past,

for all our victories and failures,

People: **for in all of it you have loved us
and you have sustained us.**

Presider: And now, letting go of what lies behind—

honoring what we must, forgiving what we must—

People: **we lean forward to what lies ahead.**

Presider: By your grace we press on toward the goal

of the call to love, your sacred call to us in Christ Jesus.

People: **God, you are our call. You are the road.**

You are our journey. Alleluia! Amen.



SONG FOR GOD

“Guide My Feet” FWS #2208 v.1*

Guide my feet while I run this race. (Yes, my Lord!)

Guide my feet while I run this race. (Yes, my Lord!)

**Guide my feet while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain)**

Presider: In the spirit of beloved community, I hereby call the Church Conference of [*church name*] into session and ask for your response.

People: **We are here as a United Methodist community of God to account for our ministries, to order our life together, and to resolve that in the year ahead we will answer the call of Jesus Christ to his disciples, leading this church into active ministries of love, truth, and justice.**

Presider: Knowing that we are all called to ministry of beloved community together, lay and clergy alike, let us enter into the business of your Church Conference.

WORK FOR GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

1. Vote to authorize virtual meeting (where applicable)

We move that those who are authorized to participate in the church conference¹ of [*church name*] on [*date*] hereby agree that we consent to proceed with a virtual meeting using remote technology, and consent that all of our decisions are in accordance with the Constitution of The United Methodist Church (Division Two, Section VI, Article II [¶33]) and with the laws of the church, and are therefore legal and binding actions of the conference.

Any training for voting should be completed at this time. See 11b.

2. Election of Secretary

A volunteer needs to take handwritten or typed minutes that will be submitted to the district office within one week of the conference.

3. Recording attendance

The elected recording secretary should take attendance in the best way possible. This attendance record is submitted with the minutes to the district office within one week of the conference.

4. Approval of Minutes of 2021 Church Conference and any special Church or Charge Conferences that have taken place since the 2021 Church Conference (including BSA Bankruptcy Ballot Charge Conferences).

5. Approval of Audit/Fund Balance Report from 2021

6. Trustee Report

¹ A church conference is where all church members are invited to be present and vote. Non-members can be present with voice, but no vote. A charge conference is where duly elected members of the Administrative Council are invited to be present and vote. Non-members of the Administrative Council can be present with voice, but no vote.

- a. Has the congregation received any bequests from a will? Bequests from wills that have been received since the last Church Conference must be accepted by vote.
- b. Has the congregation used any capital/principle from investments/endowments for operating expenses this year? If so, for what purposes and how much?
- c. Has the congregation spent any funds realized from the sale of a parsonage? If so, for what purpose and how much? Was this done with permission from the DS?

Remind the trustees that the Book of Discipline requires an annual accessibility audit. (Details are found in Item 7 on the Report of the Trustees form.) Additionally, at annual conference 2022, we approved that each charge would “complete an energy audit and act on it, reporting and celebrating progress at their annual church conferences.” A checklist is on the District webpages.

7. Staff / Pastor Parish Relations Report

Approval of Compensation for Pastor and Other Staff Appointed by the Bishop

The pastor’s base compensation, housing exclusion, and reimbursement amount must be separately included in the vote and should be reported that way by the SPRC chair. If the pastor intends to take a housing exclusion, it should be recorded in the minutes.

8. Finance Report

Update on Year-to-Date Finances

Approval of 2023 Budget if prepared

As needed an update on mission shares will be provided.

9. Lay Leadership / Nominations Report

Election of Church Leaders and Trustees

All leadership/nomination reports shall be completed and emailed to the presider before the church conference.

10. Lay Servant / Lay Speaker / Certified Lay Minister Reports

Approval and reaffirmation of any in these categories

Each lay servant/speaker/minister should have paperwork completed. The paperwork should include three copies to be signed: 1 for the lay person, 2 for the district.

11. Candidate Reports

The District Superintendent must be notified of new candidates when the church conference schedule is set.

a. Reaffirmation of Candidates for Ministry

b. Examination and Paper Ballot Vote for any New Candidate for Ministry

Those attending the conference via audio/visual will submit their vote privately to the presider via the chat function, the poll feature, or a poll site. Some platforms only allow one vote per log-in. In that case there may need to be a supplementary text, email, or call-in option for multiple users of the same device. Those attending the conference via phone will need to email, mail, or call in their vote to the presider. If virtual voting is not possible, a mail in, written ballot will be taken. The results of the vote may need to be announced at a later date. A copy of the votes must be saved for the record.

c. Examination and Recommendation of Candidates for Church Related Vocations

12. Clergy Reports
 - a. Retired Minister Report(s)
 - b. Extension Minister Report(s)
 - c. Pastor Report(s)
13. Membership Report and Remembering our Saints
14. Other business and prayers for the people

TABLE FELLOWSHIP IN BELOVED COMMUNITY

SONG FOR GOD

“Guide My Feet” #2208 v. 2

Hold my hand while I run this race. *(Yes, my Lord!)*

Hold my hand while I run this race. *(Yes, my Lord!)*

**Hold my hand while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain!** *(race in vain)*

Presider: Have you heard the news that we have been set free?

People: **We have all been emancipated!**

Presider: With mercy and grace we have been redeemed.

People: **Our great trial of bondage has ended.**

Presider: Hallelujah! When the Lord has set us free, we are free indeed.

People: **Hallelujah! Glory Hallelujah! We are truly free.**

Presider: Before we were even aware, we were already free.

Even while we were still living in bondage, we were already free.

The world kept this truth from us, but God declares that all are free.

God is the one who demands, “Let my people go!”

Unloose the bonds of sin.

Unloose the bonds of oppression.

Unloose the bonds of discrimination.

Unloose the bonds of racism.

Unloose all that keeps us from being truly free.

We are free today and we join our prayers with all the prayers of thanksgiving given by all who have gone before us.

We are free today and we join our shouts with all the shouts of praise that arise before the throne of heaven, saying:

People: **We sing freedom's song**

Giving God greatest honor

The Lord is my strength

The Lord is my song

The Lord has won my freedom

The Lord has saved me

My ancestor's God

Source of Freedom is God's name

I will honor the Lord.

(Exodus 15:1b-2)

SONG FOR GOD

“Guide My Feet” #2208 v. 3

Stand by me while I run this race. (*Yes, my Lord!*)

Stand by me while I run this race. (*Yes, my Lord!*)

Stand by me while I run this race,

for I don't want to run this race in vain! (*race in vain*)

Presider: You are the Great Liberator, and we do worship you,
but so is Jesus, your living presence upon the earth.
Jesus left all the glories of heaven,
selling himself into slavery,
so that Christ might set the world free
from bondage to sin and death.

Jesus left the place of honor at the Passover
to become as the lowest slave,
to wash the feet of sinful people:
betrayers, false friends, and deserters,
to free us from bondage to privilege and honor.

Jesus sought to free the world from bondage
when He took the bread of the oppressed,
blessed it, broke it, and shared it saying:
“Take, eat, this is my body broken and given for you.”
Remember the price paid for your freedom.

Jesus sought to free the world from bondage
when He took the cup, blessed it and shared it saying:
“Drink with me this cup of my blood,
poured out as a sacrifice to honor God's eternal covenant of grace,
guaranteeing not only your freedom,
but the freedom of the whole world from bondage to sin and death.”
Remember the price paid for your freedom.

The price paid for our freedom has been high.
It was paid freely, looking forward to the day when all would be free.
We too are ready to pay any price for freedom
as we follow Christ into this holy mystery:

People: **Christ died for freedom.**
Christ arose in freedom.
For freedom Christ comes again and again.

SONG FOR GOD

“Guide My Feet” TFWS #2208 v. 4

I'm your child while I run this race. (*Yes, my Lord!*)

I'm your child while I run this race. (*Yes, my Lord!*)

**I'm your child while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (*race in vain*)**

Presider: Holy Sacrifice, Freedom's Promise
pour yourself out freely upon these gifts of bread and cup,
so that they may become for us the body and blood of Christ
the price of freedom.

Holy Sacrifice, Freedom's Promise
pour yourself out freely upon the gift of our own precious lives
so that they may become for those in bondage, your church,
the sacrificial body and spotless bride of Christ
the price of freedom.

Holy Sacrifice, Freedom's Promise
on this day pour yourself out freely upon those present
empower them to speak out for those in bondage,
those without a voice,
those without power,
those who this day live in slavery.
May every oppressor hear on this day the voice of Almighty God saying loud and
clear,
"Let my people go!"

With freedom's joy we praise the name of Jesus our Liberator.
With freedom's joy we praise the Holy Spirit our Comforter.
With freedom's joy we praise our Creator who made us free.
Receive our worship, our gratitude, and our thanksgiving, today and forever.

People: **Amen.**

Presider: Now let us pray following the pattern of Christ:

People: **Our Father* in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom** come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom**, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

**or Mother/Parent **or kin-dom*

BREAKING BREAD AND SHARING CUP

SONG FOR GOD

“Guide My Feet” TFWS #2208 v. 5

Search my heart while I run this race. (Yes, my Lord!)

Search my heart while I run this race. (Yes, my Lord!)

**Search my heart while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain)**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Thank you for sharing with us this holy mystery found in Jesus Christ. It has given us a sense of freedom from all that has held us in bondage. This gift of freedom excites us and we want to share it. Send us out into the world, where too many still struggle. We know the truth that once you have set them free, they are truly free. They just need to know that freedom is already theirs to enjoy. Use our lives to share this good news that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

GOING FORTH IN LOVE

FORMAL MOTION TO ADJOURN THE CHURCH CONFERENCE

Presider: As our time together comes to an end, I declare this Church Conference adjourned.

COMMISSION

Presider: Let us leave our old lives behind, putting everything on the line for this mission, sprinting toward the only goal that counts, to hear God's call to resurrection life and liberation found in Jesus. **Amen.**

OUR WORSHIP IS OVER. OUR SERVICE BEGINS.

* “This Is a Day of New Beginnings” (United Methodist Hymnal 383) may be substituted for the SONG FOR GOD using verses in this order: 1, 5, 2, 3, 4.

The GATHERING REFLECTION is Philippians 3:12-14 from The Message Bible.

The OPENING PRAYER was written by Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes for the 2022 New England Church Conferences.

The SONG FOR GOD “Guide My Feet” is an African American Spiritual.

The COMMUNION LITURGY is a Great Thanksgiving Celebrating Juneteenth written by Rev. Mary Johnson and adapted for our church conferences. This liturgy can be found at: <https://www.r2hub.org/library/great-thanksgiving-juneteenth>

Rev. Mary C. Johnson is a retired member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. She earned an M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and a Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction from Moravian Theological Seminary. She is a member of the Upper Room's Academy for Spiritual Formation. She has served Congregations in Indiana, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. She now resides in Carrollton, Virginia. The LORD'S PRAYER is the Ecumenical Text, adapted, that can be found in the United Methodist Hymnal, #894.

The BENEDICTION was adapted from Philippians 3:13-14 from The Voice Bible.

This document was assembled by Rev. Megan Stowe, Superintendent for the Commonwealth West District.