Preparation in this “In-Between Time”

The shape of The United Methodist Church will likely change considerably in the next couple of years. Although we do not yet know how it will look, Minnesota Conference leaders are preparing for whatever might happen. Here is a brief look at some of the work that various teams and leaders are engaging in as they seek to guide us into the future:

**New Task Force:**
Bishop Ough called together a task force comprised of representatives from the Board of Trustees, Board of Pensions, Council on Finance and Administration, District Board of Church Location and Building, and Cabinet. It met June 11 to define its work and to create a process for disaffiliation in response to the action of General Conference 2019 that allows a congregation to leave The United Methodist Church. Minnesota Conference leaders are not encouraging this option as there is really nowhere to go to at this point, but they do want to make sure there is a process in place as required, and that the process is fair and consistent. Their goal is to have the plan and process ready by the Jan. 1, 2020 effective date.

**Board of Trustees:**
If The United Methodist Church does divide or dissolve, or a new church emerges, there is currently no mechanism for an entire annual conference to make a graceful exit from The United Methodist Church, and so the Board of Trustees is looking into the legalities of how that could be done if our annual conference chose to do that. Trustees are also monitoring legislation coming from other annual conferences or entities to General Conference 2020 that would create a process for an annual conference to gracefully exit The United Methodist Church. There are no decisions being made about separation at this point. Trustees are simply doing their due diligence to be prepared if that becomes an option as the denomination sorts itself out and the Minnesota Conference is interested in exercising that option.

**Board of Pensions:**
The Board of Pensions is running models for how to assign the fair share of unfunded pension liability to a church that seeks disaffiliation. There is no one formula coming from Wespath on how to do this. It is up to each annual conference to figure it out, much like we determine our own apportionment formula. It is more complex than you might think. The Board wants to get it right, and to be consistent, fair, and transparent. Board members are staying abreast of how other annual conferences are determining their formula as they work carefully on ours and plan to have it ready by the Jan. 1, 2020 deadline. The Board wants to assure every Minnesota United Methodist that the conference has done a good job of funding our collective pension liability. Our relationship with Wespath is already set up to serve the whole church in whatever expression of the church emerges so that clergy pensions are secure. The Board is also looking at how best to protect those assets, given the uncertainties of the future form of the Minnesota Conference, so they
continue to be in place for the sake of the clergy of the conference. Staying together as an annual conference is the best way to manage our current and future obligations.

**Council on Finance and Administration (CFA):**
The Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) is monitoring the Minnesota Conference’s financial health and apportionment receipt rate. Under this team’s leadership, the conference is still investing in our key missional foci of starting new churches, equipping existing churches, and developing leaders. It is important that we do not “stop” ministry and simply wait to see what happens. We want to continue to be vital congregations and a vital conference, living out our gospel imperatives to the best of our ability. That is how we ensure our future.

**Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM):**
The Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) continues to refine the criteria and competencies for licensing, commissioning, and ordination of clergy leaders, as it seeks to call forth the best leaders and resource them for effective ministry in all contexts in Minnesota. BOOM is working hard to equip all of its members in its interview and discernment processes to ensure that all whom God has called and gifted will find a place to use those gifts to the glory of God.

**Other Affiliated Entities:**
As the shape of our annual conference and denomination changes, the Minnesota Conference’s connectional ministry partners are looking at how to best position themselves in order to continue to attend to their missional focus and stay connected to the churches of the Minnesota Conference. The Dakotas-Minnesota Area Camp and Retreat Ministries leaders are asking the question: How does camping continue to be a place for the whole church in whatever new forms of The United Methodist Church emerge? The Minnesota United Methodist Foundation and Hamline University, our local United Methodist-related college, are reviewing their articles of incorporation and considering potential adjustments so that they can continue their strong ministry connection to the Minnesota Conference and yet chart a strong pathway forward that allows them to serve the greatest number of people and churches.

**District Superintendents:**
The Minnesota Conference’s five district superintendents are staying in close conversation with the clergy and congregations in their districts, and encouraging them to enter into thoughtful conversation with one another about how they will continue to be the church God has called them to be in their communities now and into the future.