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NEW SONG FOR MICHIGAN CONFERENCE

Posted on [July 13, 2021](#)



The Rev. Paul Perez, Director of Connectional Ministries for the Michigan Conference challenged the conference in his message on June 5 to be a people shaped by all of the Psalms. He urged

members to find room in our congregations and our Christian service for both lament and praise, honesty, and sharing of hope. ~ mic screen image

The Rev. Paul Perez shares four Strategic Directions from the Conference Leadership Council as well as missional and connectional challenges. "God is graciously inviting us to sing a new song," he says.

PAUL PEREZ

Director of Connectional Ministry, Michigan Conference

As we all collectively emerge from the pandemic and live through a season of denominational disruption, we have an opportunity, a moment, not simply to "return" but to "reset." To let go of things we learned we can do without, embrace the new ways we labored to adapt and adopt and prepare to respond with care and compassion as we heal and celebrate together. I believe God is graciously inviting us to sing a new song.

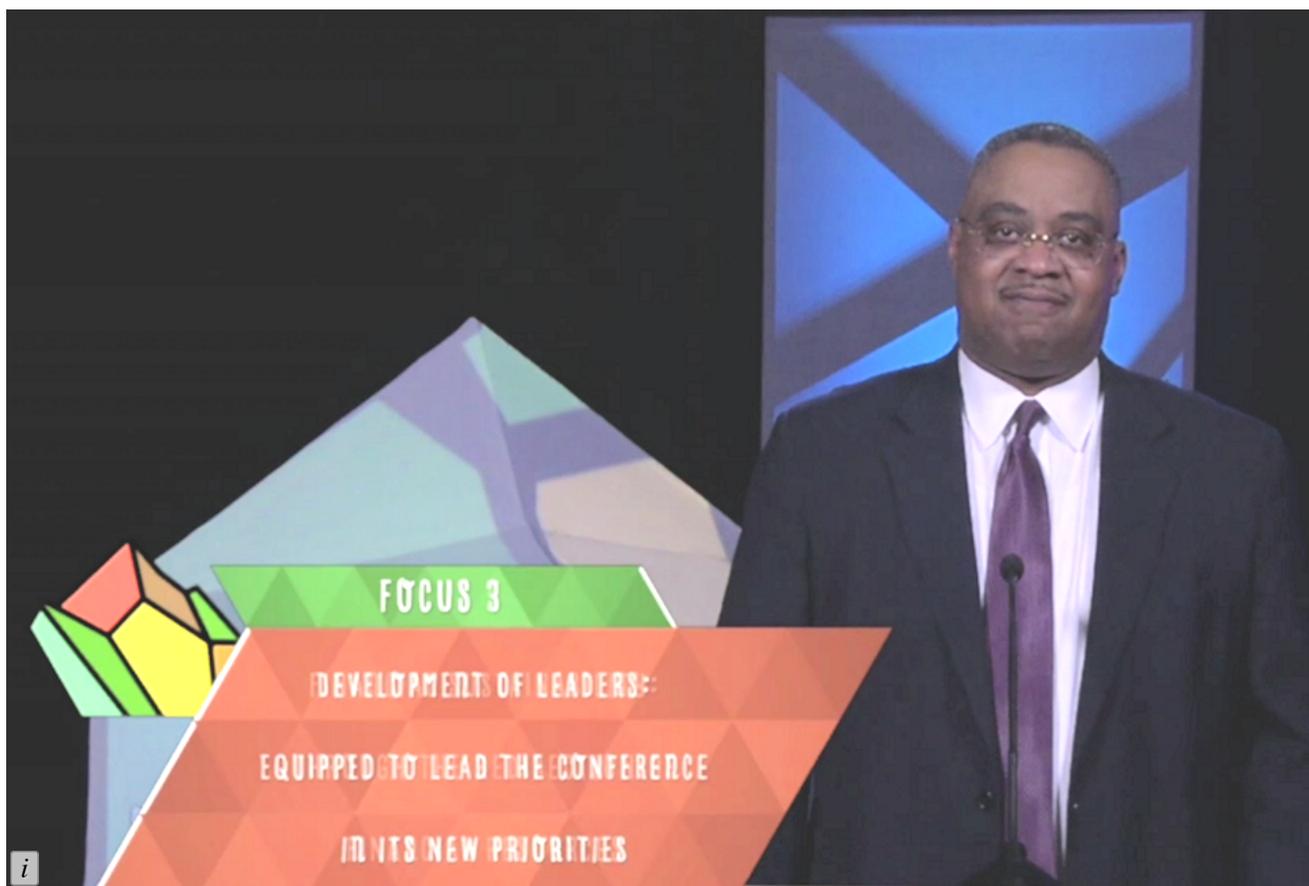
In my sermon during Annual Conference worship on June 5, I wondered out loud:

Let's not rush back to normal. Let's not return too hastily to what is comfortable, known, and familiar. Let's not be lulled back to "what we have always done", to "the way we've always done it," to what makes us comfortable because we can control and predict it Michigan United Methodists – I wonder – Can we sing to the LORD a new song?

I believe God is graciously inviting us to sing a new song. To take the next faithful step in our journey as Michigan United Methodists.

One of the first tasks I undertook when I became the Director of Connectional Ministry last October was to assist the Bishop's Strategic Task Force in completing its report and recommendations. The task force was a group convened by Bishop David Bard in 2018, at the request of the Conference Leadership Council (CLC) and the Council on Finance and Administration (CF&A). The focus was to address the challenges facing United Methodism in Michigan.

The group submitted its [full report to the Conference Leadership Council in November 2020](#). The CLC voted to affirm the report as a "living document" and as a set of "strategic directions." The report was shared with conference and district staff and conference agency leaders. From notes in the link above, you see the document is truly "alive," already changing and shifting.



The Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty, chair of the Conference Leadership Council, reviewed the main concepts of the Strategic Directions during Friday's session of the Michigan Annual Conference. ~ mic photo/Aaron Word

Darryl Totty, chair of the CLC, introduced the vision, challenges, and strategic directions outlined during the report during [his Annual Conference report](#).

Over the coming months, I will use this blog spot to focus on the vision, challenges, and strategic directions. I believe they provide an opening riff for the new song we are called to sing in this moment.

The report casts a **vision** of "re-founding a Methodist movement in Michigan through new ministries in new communities."

It identifies the following **missional and connectional challenges** facing the Michigan Conference.

Missional Challenges:

1. Long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic

2. Struggle to dismantle systemic racism
3. Declining religious participation; growth of “no religious affiliation”

Connectional Challenges:

1. Outdated organizational models
2. Michigan Conference’s financial situation
3. Denominational restructuring and split

Four **strategic directions** or foci are recommended in the report.

1. Sharing God’s Love with Others: Renewed Passion for Personal Faith Formation & Sharing
2. Building the Beloved Community: Intentional Equity and the Dismantling of Systemic Racism
3. Development of Leaders: Equipped to Lead the Conference in its New Priorities
4. Financial Sustainability: Through the Redirection of Financial Resources

Over the next three months, I will reflect on the vision, challenges, and strategic directions.

August’s blog will focus on the vision: “Re-founding Michigan Methodism through new ministries in new communities.”

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