

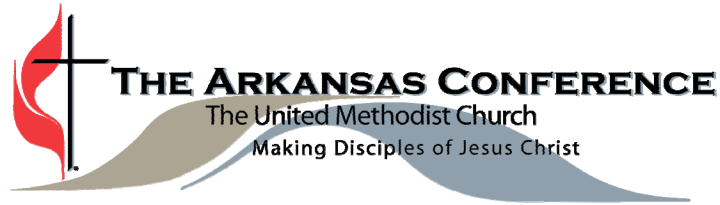
AN APOSTOLATE OF PRAYER

“Imagine Ministry” A Guide for Reading, Meditation, and Prayer August 1, 2009

We ask that pastors, prayer groups, teams in the local church, and individuals use the prayer guide as an intentional daily and weekly study for devotions. This prayer guide is available on the conference web site and will be sent out weekly on the conference email network.

Sources:

- A Guide for Reading, Meditation, and Prayer for all who participate in The United Methodist Way.
- Upper Room Books
- General Board of Discipleship, United Methodist Church
- Scripture quotations are from the NRSV
- Excerpts from “Covenant Renewal Service and Opening Prayer,” copyright 1992 United Methodist Publishing House. Wesley Covenant Service abridged by Ole E. Borgen.
- United Methodist Hymnal



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“Imagine Ministry” A Guide for Reading, Meditation, and Prayer

Week One: August 1 – 8, 2009

Pray for guidance and discernment: If you wish, write that prayer here and use it for the next seven days.

In early Arkansas Methodism, as the frontier pioneers brought their distinct forms and brand of religious freedom to the new land across the Mississippi River. Almost everywhere that people traded or gathered to meet, a Methodist congregation was soon formed out of the network of relationships and faith. Our church had its most rapid growth from the middle of the 1800's to the end of World War II. We are seeing renewed growth in churches that intentionally address the surrounding mission fields in their communities and around the world. New church starts across the conference have made new disciples and inspired hope for the future.

Read Philippians 1:1-11 slowly and prayerfully. What word or phrase stands out for you? Perhaps you may write a similar prayer in your own words that would the spiritual desire of your heart for those who depend on you as their spiritual leader or companion.

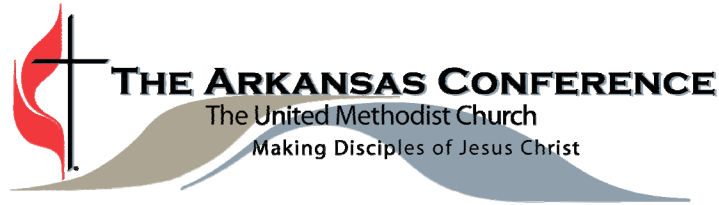
Pray for all those who will participate in the “Imagine Ministry” journey over the next two years of the life and ministry of the Arkansas Conference. Pray particularly for those who share leadership responsibilities with you in your annual conference. Pray for a process that starts out on the grass roots level of each local church, individual members and guests of the congregation, that God's Spirit will start here and start a movement of God's people called United Methodist in a new direction in Arkansas.

In your normal experiences of Sunday worship, what gives you genuine joy and hope for the future of The United Methodist Church and your local congregation?

In your normal experiences of Sunday worship, what gives you pain and genuine concern for the future of The United Methodist Church and your local congregation?

What is the prayer God is leading you to pray at this moment?

“The biggest challenge is that we live in a setting permeated by powerful shaping forces for ideals other than the Christian gospel. Naming these competing forces and ideals, within the church and the culture, will be a necessary step in the self-recognition and repentance necessary for renewal in the Methodist renewal. But this must be complemented by wise and effective leadership – both in developing structures, practices and patterns of life that embody the alternative ideals of our tradition; and in discerning those current structures, practices, and patterns of life that must be “let go” in order to embrace the new.” - The United Methodist Way, GBOGM, Convocation for Extended Cabinets, publication.



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Week Two: August 9 -15, 2009

In this prayer guide, we take seriously the reflection and discernment of what it means for our churches and church members, to study and reflect upon the Mission of The United Methodist Church, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Any such endeavor really begins with the church *in me*, the church *in each of us*, and Christ who links and connects us to one another across the distance of space, race, culture and lifestyles.

Read John 15:1-5 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

The covenant is a powerful biblical metaphor for our relationship with God. Another metaphor for life in Christ is that of the vine and the branches. Reflect on the spiritual meaning of Jesus words “I am the vine, you are the branches.” (v.5a) What does this mean to you?

What is the relationship between abiding and pruning? Why is it that some United Methodist leaders and some United Methodist congregations are fruitless? Why are some leaders and congregations fruitful?

Wisdom from the Wesleys:

If grafted into Thee, the Vine,
I bring forth fruit, the praise is Thine:
But use Thy sin-retrenching power,
Prune me that I may bring forth more;
That through Thy Spirit's grace, I may
The truth with all my heart obey.

Kindly Thou does chastise, reprove,
The objects of Thy choicest love,
That thus we may Thy mind express,
Partakers of Thy holiness,
May meekly all Thy sufferings share,
And fruit unto perfection bear.

Read John 15:7-8. What words or phrases stand out for you?

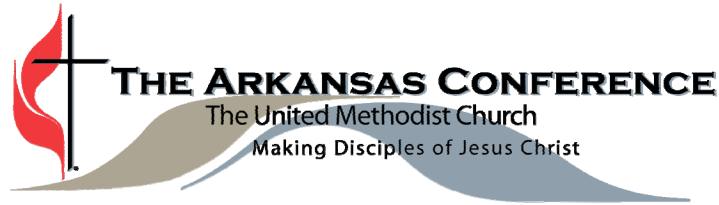
The promise of Jesus is shocking and based on one single condition, abiding. (vs. 7)
What does this mean to you?

What does it mean for the local church, conference, for The United Methodist Church?

What is the relationship between bearing fruit and becoming disciples? (vs. 8)

What does this mean to you?

What does it mean for the local church, conference, for The United Methodist Church?



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Week Three: August 16 – August 22, 2009

Claim the wisdom God has promised you in James 1:5, “If any of you lack wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” Use this prayer for the next seven days.

Characteristics of Congregations Embodying the Methodist Way

A congregation that embodies the wisdom of the Methodist Way broadly in its life and ministry will be marked by at least these characteristics:

- Commitment to ongoing catechesis and formation in Christian doctrine, with emphasis on the transforming power and goal of God’s saving work in our lives and world.
- Faithful worship that draws on the rich liturgical resources of the tradition within the cultural context, inviting participants to celebrate and be shaped by the whole of the Christian story into the image of the triune God.
- Regular celebration of Holy Communion and use of other occasional ritual means of grace such as the Love Feast and the Wesleyan Covenant Service.
- “Watching over one another in love,” through small groups that nurture growth in discipleship by providing mutual support, mentoring, and accountability.
- Emphasis on cultivating intentional relationships and ministry with those whom Charles Wesley called “Jesus’ bosom friends” – the poor, the imprisoned, children, the powerless, and the vulnerable.
- Embrace of Wesley’s model of stewardship as a way of life for individuals and the congregation.
- Support for and modeling of regular Bible study, prayer, fasting, and other personal “works of piety.”
- Consistent concern for inviting individuals and families into relationship with Jesus Christ, combined with wise practices for initiating them into the Body of Christ.
- Attention to identifying and cultivating those gifted to take roles of leadership in the range of ministry of the congregation.

- Appreciation for connection with other congregations and institutions in participating in God's mission of personal, societal and global transformation. ⁽¹⁾

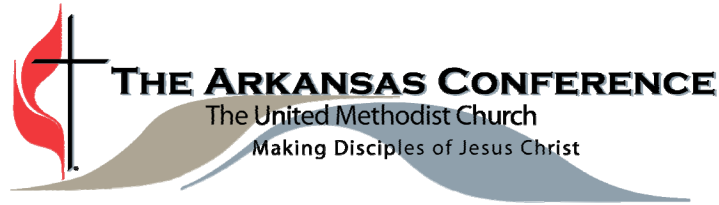
(1) Appendix to The United Methodist Way

Which of these summary points are present in your local church already? Summarize them below and give thanks to God!

Which of the points are not present in your local church?

Which one or two is God leading you to make a matter of prayer?

Pray particularly for those who share leadership responsibilities in the local church and annual conference that will wrestle with these and other ministry concepts over the next few months.



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Week Four: August 23 – August 29, 2009

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 slowly and prayerfully. What word or phrase stands out for you today?

“We are what (God) has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (v.10).

Reflect on this truth – you are what God has made you. What does this mean at this moment in your spiritual journey?

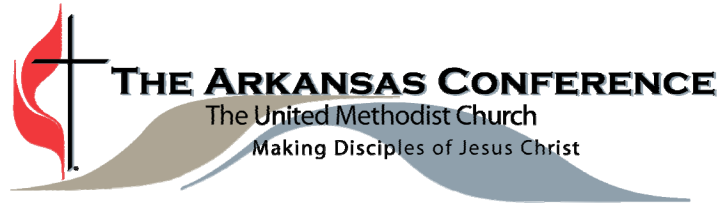
How do you express your gifts and talents in your current role as a spiritual leader?

What are the unique “good works” God has given you to do in your personal life, in your family, and in The United Methodist Church?

Wisdom from the Wesleys:

The Wesleyan “means of grace” include worship, singing, prayer, searching the Scripture, Christian conference, fasting or abstinence, small groups for mutual accountability and support, and regular participation in works of mercy and justice. This is a picture of a Christian life shaped by joyful obedience. And these practices are to take

place in all three areas of our Christian life; e.g., worship is to include our personal times to worship God, our family time for worship, and our worship together as the church (the body of Christ). In the same manner, prayer is understood to include personal prayer, family prayer and prayer together as the church (the body of Christ). Searching the scriptures would include personal reading, meditation and immediately putting into practice what has been revealed to us as an individual, to our family, and together as the church (the body of Christ.).



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“Imagine Ministry” A Guide for Reading, Meditation, and Prayer

Week Five: August 30 – September 5, 2009

Read Ephesians 3:1-6 slowly and prayerfully. What word or phrase stands out for you today?

What is “the mystery of Christ” entrusted to you?

How are you making this known to others? Record your reflections.

What is “the mystery of Christ” entrusted to the United Methodists?

How are you making this known to others?

Gil Rendle has written in *Leadership Under Constraints*, “...resources and outcomes are easily confused. An outcome is something one wants to happen or something to be produced. A resource is something needed to accomplish that outcome. Congregations frequently confuse significant resources such as budget, staff, or a building as outcomes. This confusion, for example, often lies at the heart of the familiar depression and disappointment that congregations experience at the completion of a new building. It is

likely that the leaders in their work on the new building, lost sight of the real outcome of community connection. They forgot that there was a reason for which they needed the resource of a new building. Some resources such as staff, facilities, budgets and structure are expensive and demanding and can easily be construed as outcomes within themselves. Congregational and conference leaders must likewise be clear about what are outcomes and what are resources.”

What is the purpose of the local congregation?

The outcome or mission of the local congregation?

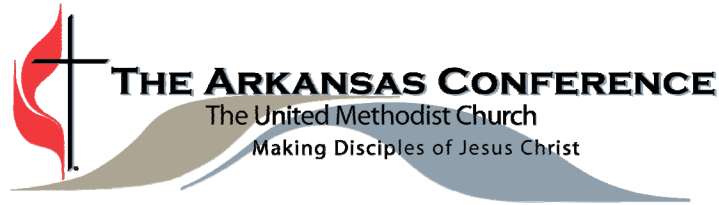
What is the purpose of the annual conference?

Wisdom from the Wesleys:

In the minutes of Several Conversations between John and Charles Wesley and their leaders, the question was asked:

- Q. 3. What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?
- A. Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.

Quoted from the “Minutes of Several Conversation between Mr. Wesley and Others from the year 1744, to the year 1789”; Works (Jackson edition) 8:325-6



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Week Six: September 6 – September 12, 2009

Read Isaiah 54:10 slowly and prayerfully. Mountains communicate permanence and power. The hill country in Israel is vast. So too is the covenant of God’s peace. What is the Spirit saying to you through this text?

Eighty-five percent (85%) of the existing congregations in Arkansas, have been established over one hundred plus years. It has been said that the longer a congregation has been in existence in one place, the less it knows about the surrounding community. It has drawn upon itself and its membership and knows less about the mission of the community of which it is a part. However, this *cannot* be said of *all* congregations, for some are busting forth with new people and missions to the least, last and lost.

The journey of renewal and spiritual growth begins with each individual, one at a time, then two in conversation and holy conferencing, and reaches out to others in need, the neighbor who we do not know by name, to those on the other side of the street, city, delta, and even across the world.

Please pray the covenant prayer contained in the Wesley covenant service. Let the words and the Holy Spirit speak deeply to your heart and life.

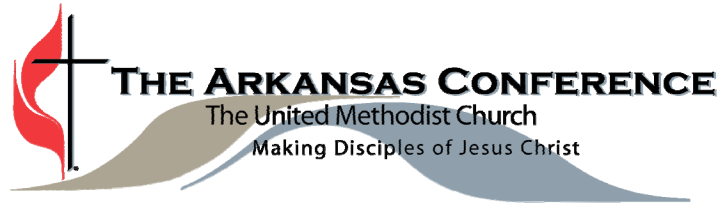
Wisdom from the Wesleys – The Covenant Prayer:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt,
Rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O gracious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Record your thoughts, feelings and emotions related to this prayer.

How is God leading you into the Christian life and discipleship.



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“Imagine Ministry” A Guide for Reading, Meditation, and Prayer

Week Seven: September 13 -19, 2009

Read Ephesians 2:1-9 slowly and prayerfully. What word or phrase stands out for you?

The theology of the United Methodist Way is grounded in the Trinity and the dynamic relationship between faith, love, and obedience. With all Christians we celebrate the biblical truth: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the results of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How is God leading you to teach, interpret, and live out the Christian life?

In the 2007 gathering of the Extended Cabinets Convocation at Lake Junaluska, a District Superintendent from Africa conversed with a DS from the Arkansas Conference. In that short conversation which was friendly and insightful, the DS from Africa said the following. “Thank you for being the mother church to the United Methodist Church in Africa. Your dimes, quarters and dollars collected for missionaries in the 1950 -70’s, trained and equipped the sending forth of those missionaries to help give birth to our church. Soon missionaries from Africa will be sent back to America to assist you in getting back on track with your evangelism efforts.”

Where in our local church are we off track?

Where are we on track and rolling along?

Where are we off track in the districts and annual conference?

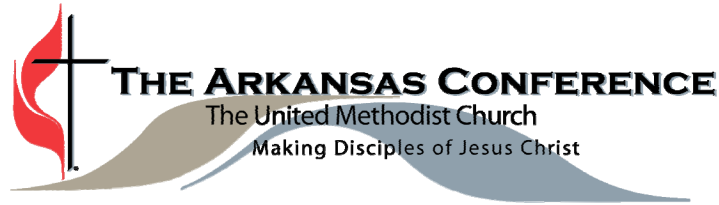
Where are we seeing new signs of renewal, growth and hope?

Three leadership questions before us:

Who are we?

What has God called us to do or to be?

Who is our neighbor?



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Week Eight: September 20 – September 26, 2009

Write a prayer this week for God’s guidance and a deeper understanding of God’s abundance. Claim the promise contained in Mark 6:41 ff. “taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all (5,000) ate and were filled.”

If we give what we have Jesus can make it more than enough.

The disciples correctly assessed the situation and gave Jesus good practical advice – it is late and the people will need food. Send them away to take care of themselves. Jesus’ command, “You give them something to eat” must have felt overwhelming – the needs were too great. Imagine yourself to be one of the disciples. Record your thoughts, feelings and emotions.

When you look at the needs of the church and of the world today, how do you feel?

What is your response if Jesus were to say to you today, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” Where would you go to find the answer?

Radical hospitality and extravagant generosity both require honesty. How many loaves have you? Go and see – is the first step on the journey. So, how many loaves do you have?

In early Arkansas Methodism, when we grew at a fast pace, the circuit rider in making the circuit was always looking for a new place to preach the gospel. If a building was empty at certain times in a week, or Sunday morning, the preacher would write the presiding elder (DS) and ask permission to start a preaching post. Over time if it grew, it became a preaching station, and thus a new church was added to the circuit. Pastors were always looking for a new place to start a church. While the preacher was on the circuit, the laity were seeking and bringing new converts to the faith for the circuit pastor to baptize and confirm when the pastor was next present.

In spite of economic challenges, we live in an age of abundance and opportunity to share the gospel. Where in your local community are there new church starts or places that your congregation, small group, and lay speakers can reach out to the un-churched?

Why not respond to the opportunity? Do you need help? The Annual Conference New Church Start Institute can be of assistance.

Please continue to pray for the Imagine Ministry Team and for the future of the Arkansas Annual Conference.