

Board of Laity

Janice McCallen, Lay Leader

The Memphis Conference Board of Laity is composed of various lay and group leaders from around the conference that represent multiple ministries of the laity. Our purpose is to foster an awareness and advocacy for the role of the laity, to encourage laity participation in the life of the church, to provide leadership training for lay leaders, lay servants and annual conference delegates, and to promote the observance of Laity Sunday.

To strengthen our emphasis to **Invest in Young People**, our churches have been active with our children, youth and campus ministries. Rev. Amanda Crice has done an excellent job of leading our Conference Youth Ministry and mentoring several young adults to assume various leadership roles. In this particularly unique time of physical distancing, many of our churches are finding creative ways to connect with our children and youth via virtual Sunday School, mid-week meet-ups, virtual Easter Egg hunts and other activities. Some young people are also making wellness check calls to senior members of their churches. Our young people have also been instrumental in assisting their church leaders in this new world of electronic worship.

Our churches continue to **Engage the Mission Field** within their communities and beyond. There is an increased awareness and need for food ministries and our churches have found creative ways to answer the call. A number of our churches currently serve as food distribution sites and some are even offering front porch delivery of food boxes for needy families. Thousands of face protection masks have been sewn, packaged and shipped to medical facilities within and outside the U.S. Blessing boxes and “share shacks” are popping up around the conference as places to deposit donations of non-perishable food items and paper products that are available to their neighbors. Our United Methodist Men and Women’s groups continue to stay involved in mission opportunities as much as possible.

Our conference continues to provide excellent training opportunities that provide ways for us to **Create Transforming Lay and Clergy Leaders**. Led by Susan Davidson, our Lay Servant Training continues to expand throughout the conference, with many classes comprised of youth and young adults who may be discerning a call to ministry. Bible studies and other small group events are being live streamed and participation has been very strong. Districts offered some sort of leadership training opportunity earlier this year for key local church leaders – some of these being led by Discipleship Ministries. Additionally, laity continue to read, reflect and study on their own in order to further nurture and strengthen their spiritual lives.

Our churches continue to navigate the complex waters of our current physical distancing mandate. We have seen an increase in worship participation via our electronic platforms as we seek to continue to **Grow Fruitful and Faithful Churches**. Our churches have been extremely innovative and creative as they have worked to provide worship experiences for their members. Lay and clergy alike have enjoyed participating in multiple worship service experiences through live streaming, Facebook Live, Zoom, and video recordings. It’s truly been a blessing to worship with churches all throughout our conference that we may not otherwise have an opportunity to visit. It’s also exciting to see that our churches are still taking in new members, even in this time of physical distancing.

Our Board of Laity met recently with Bishop McAlilly. In late March, we had a scheduled one-day retreat with the Tennessee Conference Board of Laity, but it has been postponed until August 29. Meanwhile, it is our plan for both Boards of Laity to meet together via Zoom in the near future so that we can begin to build relationships with each other as we move toward becoming a new conference.

Our laity continue to partner with and pray for our clergy as we work together to fulfill the mission of the Memphis Annual Conference.

The Peace of Christ be with you!

Lay Resource Leader Report 2019-2020

MS River District

Susan Davidson

The focus of the work in this district is on Lay Leadership. We have had new laity participate in the Lay Servant Ministries. There have been 2 Basic Lay Servant Classes and 2 Advanced Lay Servant Classes. We have had 2 classes of Certified Lay Ministers trained this year. All of these people are serving in ministry in some way. We had a Youth Lay Servant Weekend Mission Trip in August. We had 36 students involved in that ministry.

A new opportunity for education for our CLMs was developed. Our District Superintendent, Dr. Cynthia Davis teaches a Practical Theology class every first Saturday before the First Sunday of the month. This is a time of teaching, sharing and Holy Communion. At this time, the communion elements are blessed by Dr. Davis. We currently have 20 Certified Lay Ministers serving churches in our district.

Another ministry in our district is run by lay persons. That is Exceptional Worship, a worship service for special needs people of all ages. This is held at Forest Heights UMC on the third Sunday of each month at 2:00. Special needs men and women, boys and girls participate in this worship

service.

We have had a district Ministry Celebration last September at Dyersburg FUMC. There, with 300-350 sisters and brothers in Christ, we worshiped together as a District.

Our situation with the Corona Virus has caused many postponements of planned events. Our April Youth Lay Servant Mission Weekend, CLM trainings, District Ministry Celebrations, District Lay Servant Appreciation Brunch and other events will be rescheduled. At this time we are using Zoom to have meetings, training and Sunday School. All of us are making an effort to stay connected as much as possible.

PURCHASE DISTRICT RESOURCE MINISTRIES

Rev. Samantha Hall, Director

We invest in young people. By providing DayShore day camp opportunities at local churches during the summer, we reach out to children who are unable or unready to attend overnight camps. Last summer, there were six camps held which was an increase of one from the year before. Many of these churches work together to raise funds so that they can provide free or reduced registration fees for children who would otherwise not be able to attend. Because of the current pandemic, we are unsure about whether or not we will be able to provide these experiences this year, but prior to that there were plans to continue this ministry. The second "NEXT: Exploring Your Christian Walk" initiative was being planned and may take place this fall once restrictions are lifted regarding group gatherings and social distancing.

We engage the mission field. This is always important and the forefront of our ministries, but it is now more important than ever. Local churches who provide feeding ministries have stepped up their services while at the same time abiding by social distancing guidelines. Many have picked up the slack when some school districts were unable to provide food due to quarantine requirements. Project Christmas House is a ministry of the Purchase District that helps a family rebuild their home after a catastrophic event from which they cannot recover alone. Led by Mr. Bill Carr, a team spent the week between Christmas and New Year's in Hattiesburg, MS working to build a home on stilts to avoid the effects of flooding. We also have churches that work to build wheelchair ramps for those who need them. One church, Reidland, has a team that has continually been in existence for twenty-five years. Led by Mr. Joe Burkhead, the team has devised a protocol that allows them to continue to meet the needs of their community while abiding by social distancing guidelines. At the time of this writing, they have built three ramps using this protocol. Third Place Ministries in Benton, led by Rev. David Garrett, helps families in crisis with past-due utility bills, gas vouchers to get a person to a medical appointment, clothing vouchers to get children back to school, and several other "crisis" needs. This is made possible by donations from churches and individuals in our community. There is a Thrift Store, New To You, that also assists with funding. Additionally, Third Place sponsors a radio show led by Mrs. Lois Cunningham that follows the Day1 show on Sundays. The show provides a worship opportunity focusing on scripture from the Revised Common Lectionary. It also brings an awareness to the community of available services and events sponsored by the District.

We create transformational lay and clergy leaders. This year, we have offered several training opportunities for both laity and clergy. Basic Lay Servant and Advanced Lay Servant classes were well attended, and twenty-two Lay Servants were approved during charge conferences this year. A book study and training session for clergy was conducted, and CEU's were awarded to those who participated.

We grow fruitful and faithful churches. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are finding this to be different than anything we have ever experienced. Our churches and our pastors are striving to find innovative ways to stay in touch with their congregations and communities. There have been many Zoom Sunday School classes and worship, FaceBook Live, YouTube and Vimeo services. Opportunities for online giving have been increased. Due to our present situation, there has been that some of our churches, especially our smaller churches who typically have lower attendance, are experiencing many "views" of their services. We hope that once we are able to worship in person once again that some of our churches will continue to use an online format as a method of outreach to their communities, and that some viewers who have not attended in person prior might do so.