



Early Edition

February, 2026

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Equipped for the Work

by Rev. James Parks,
Upper Midwest Conference Superintendent

Early in my ministry, when I was recruiting people to serve on church committees and leadership teams, I often used a line like, "It's not that much work." My thinking was that if I didn't make the task sound too big, people would be more willing to say yes. I assumed hesitation was the primary obstacle to service.

What I learned over time is that I was underappreciating both the role of leadership in the church and the desire of lay people to serve passionately and wholeheartedly. Faithful people are not discouraged by meaningful work; they are discouraged by unclear expectations. Over the years, I have learned to share a clearer picture of the calling to serve in leadership—what it requires, what it asks of us, and the prayerful commitment it deserves.

I was thinking about this as I reflected on the role of Presiding Elder in our conference. This is a role that is new to us as a denomination. Paragraph 609 of *The Book of Doctrine and Discipline* outlines twelve responsibilities for Presiding Elders. In some Global Methodist conferences, these responsibilities are carried out by full-time Presiding Elders. The Upper Midwest Conference has chosen a different approach.

We are intentionally keeping the local church as the primary place of ministry. Because of that, we have chosen to keep our conference and district structures lean, trusting that our greatest resources for ministry are found in our local congregations. This decision, however, places significant demands on those who step forward to lead at the conference and district level. To help provide clarity and sustainability, we have narrowed the focus of our Presiding Elders to three primary responsibilities: pastors to the pastors, appointment making, and charge conferences.

To support this work, we have developed a **Presiding Elder Playbook**. This resource is designed to align expectations across the conference, help local churches understand our shared processes, and provide guidance for current and future Presiding Elders. The Playbook is available on the [Clergy Resources](#) page of our conference website, and can be found at https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/_files/ugd/e430ce_1d0cdda7a97b4480bdadf1909fa136b7.pdf

This work is grounded in Paul's words in Ephesians 4: "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Leadership in the Church exists not to do all the ministry, but to equip God's people for it.

The Presiding Elder Playbook is a living document, and it will continue to grow as we learn together. My hope is that it will help equip our leaders, strengthen our churches, and keep us focused on our shared mission of building up the body of Christ. I encourage you to review the Playbook and to pray for our Presiding Elders as they serve among us. I am deeply grateful for the seventeen women and men who have stepped into this role with faith, humility, and generosity. They carry significant responsibility while continuing to lead in their local churches, and their willingness to serve in this way is a gift to our entire conference. Please join me in thanking God for them and in offering your ongoing prayers and encouragement.



Conference-Wide Mission Challenge

by Norma Morrison, Mission Team Leader

In last month's newsletter the Missions Team challenged every church in the Upper Midwest Conference to make a difference by joining together to provide life-giving water to 3 daycare centers or preschools in the province of Limpopo, South Africa. In celebration of our 3rd year as a Conference **our goal is to raise \$37,000, enough for Blessman International (our Conference-endorsed mission organization) to dig 3 wells!!!** Is your Mission Committee or Team aware of this opportunity? Does your church have a plan for raising the needed money?

Pastor Josh Swaim at Christ Church in Davenport, Iowa is doing a sermon series on missions during February using Acts 1:8 as the theme to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. Church members will be featured in a video highlighting their church's Acts 1:8 work in local, national, and international missions. A special offering will be taken for our Conference Blessman Wells Project! Thank you, Christ Church!

How is YOUR church going to help make this happen? A Lenten offering? "Noisy" offering? (Kids love collecting this money in metal buckets!) A Community fundraising dinner, soup supper, or potato bar? Pancake breakfasts? How about a self-denial challenge? Give up coffee or pop/soda during Lent or for a month and donate what would have been spent to help dig a well. We'd love to share your ideas and pictures in future newsletters!

A powerful way to share the need with your congregation is through a less than 2 minute video. Show it during worship, at your Church Council and Missions meetings, put the link in your newsletters and emails, however you can best get the word out. Here is the link to the video: <https://youtu.be/EgeEq8C-5b0>

Donations can be given online by using the following link: <https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/give>. Designate it for the South Africa Partnership Fund and add a memo that says "Well". If you mail in your donation please note "South Africa Partnership Fund - Well" on your giving form or check. Checks can be mailed to Upper Midwest Conference, PO Box 113, Enon, OH 45323. Your church will receive credit for your giving.

On a different note... We are looking for a **Missions point person for each church in the Conference**. Send those names, church name and location, email, and phone number to missions@uppermidwestgmc.org. Thanks! Questions and comments can also be sent to that email address.

Through the Blessman Wells Project, TOGETHER we can change lives in South Africa! Won't you join us to "Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth?"



Loving God & Loving Others

by Rev. Sedar Shako, Conference Prayer Team

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things." (Phil. 4:8)

February is the month we celebrate Valentine's Day. It is a special day when we are called to share true love, as God loves the world (1 Peter 4:8).

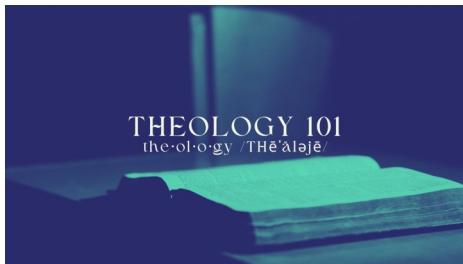
My wife and I always have a plan for this day. We remember great moments and look through some of our oldest pictures as we reflect on our lives. This time, our minds go back to our first meeting. However, there are so many ways we can show love for one another.

I believe LOVE is an action and a word that comes from the depths of our hearts and minds. Love is not only what we say to someone but also what we do. True love is shown through action, as Jesus died on a cross for us. If we show our love to one another, it is great because that is how God loves the world (John 3:16). I encourage the congregation to celebrate this day by loving everyone created in the image of God.

As an African, I thank God and the bishops of the Global Methodist Church's episcopacy council for deciding to hold the 2026 General Conference in Africa. When I heard that, I thanked God and the GMC for the love we share with all who belong to this denomination and for the fact that our love for one another is unlimited.

Through the GMC's decision to hold the General Conference in Africa, I saw it as a great sign of love, because all races are to be included in Christ Jesus, especially in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, where many people were rejected and labeled as dissidents for leaving for other denominations. The General Conference in Africa is a sign of great joy and love as we prepare for it. It shows that in the GMC, we practice love for one another without judging one another's opinions or races. When Jesus told Peter to take care of His sheep, it wasn't only those who were with Him in Israel but all the sheep in the world (John 21:15-17).

As we celebrate Valentine's Day, I pray that we all show our love to God by loving one another from our hearts, not just from our lips, regardless of condition or background. Whatever we do, do it with the love that we have experienced with God for many years. I also pray that, as God's beloved, we extend His love by providing positive feedback and encouragement for people near and far, as an extension of God's love. Praying for one another is a way to show our love for others, as God calls us to pray for one another. **Love is not only what we say to someone but also what we do!**



The Wesleyan Understanding of Salvation
Part 2: Convicting Grace
by Rev. Dr. Travis Stevick,
Pastor, Grace Methodist Church, Marcus, IA
[YouTube.com/tstevick1](https://www.youtube.com/tstevick1) travisstevick.substack.com

In my last article, the first in this series, I stated my aims in these reflections. I am hardly the first person to lay out the Wesleyan understanding of salvation and so I am not going to try to cover everything that can be said. My goal is "to put the most important issues right up front and then spend a bit of time highlighting implications that don't always get raised for those who want to go just a bit deeper."

This month, we are looking at "convicting grace." This is an aspect of the Wesleyan understanding of salvation that sometimes doesn't get talked about. Part of the reason for that is because it is not a major theme in Wesley's writings, certainly there is nowhere near the level of discussion that we get on justification and sanctification. It could be argued that convicting grace really isn't its own "kind" of grace because could be seen as part of prevenient grace. That may be so, but then we might say that there aren't really any different "kinds" of grace to start with; there is just the one grace of God and we experience it differently depending on where we are in the process.

The idea of "convicting grace," is that someone does not, in general, go from being the lord of their own life to surrendering their whole life to the lordship of Christ without some resistance. Wesley's presentation about how we move through the process of salvation was always aimed at the general experience, the way many people do, in fact, experience the grace of God. It is descriptive, not prescriptive. That is to say, it helps us to recognize landmarks on our way, not tell us what *must* happen. Most people experience conviction at some point during their coming to saving faith.

What is most important, theologically, to emphasize, is that Wesley understood convicting grace and conviction as being *part* of the process of salvation. Conviction is not primarily to be interpreted as a sign of the wrath and anger of God, seeking and even glorying in our destruction. It should be interpreted as part of God's aim of salvation for our lives. The growing awareness that the sin in our lives is fundamentally incompatible with the life of holiness and discipleship that the Gospel calls us to is not a sign that we are moving away from saving faith, but *toward* it.

To be clear, to be "moving toward" saving faith is not the same thing as to "have saving faith." A person yearning to be saved must not stop while under conviction any more than they should at prevenient grace. However, it is a phase most people go through and we must always remember it is *part* of the salvation process, a sign that a person is, by grace, drawing closer to God.

This is crucially important. We can sometimes become fixated on the love of God, and the fact that God calls us exactly as we are, and we are loved even in the midst of our sin and brokenness. If we aren't careful, we can lose sight of the fact that following Christ necessarily means denying ourselves. As Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

One of the things that the early Methodists assumed was that people who were new in their midst had not yet been justified, did not yet have saving faith. Because of that, the first and only question that needed to be answered to join was "Do you desire to flee from the wrath to come?" The strong heritage of Christianity in America can sometimes work against us. If your whole community thinks of Christian faith as the only real option, whether they live it out or not, it can be hard to explain why being a disciple of Christ is different than simply "believing in God."

You might live in a community where everyone already more or less thinks of themselves as being a Christian, whether their lives are shaped by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit or not. In situations like that, people sometimes don't think that there is much of a difference between "being a Christian," and "just being a person." When that is the basic assumption shared by most people, it can be hard to explain the kind of transformation that is supposed to take place by grace and through faith.

This is not only a theological problem, it is a practical problem. If we lose the importance of convicting grace as part of our understanding of salvation, it will impact our witness. A church that has forgotten that conviction is part of the process of salvation might say to their community, essentially, "Come and join with us. It is easy. We really aren't all that different from non-Christians. We live basically the same way and we think basically the same way. You can join with us, add Sunday worship to your schedule, and nothing else really needs to change. Just please join with us." A church with that kind of message may have a hard time reaching people. After all, why would anyone join a group that doesn't make a difference in their lives?

As a general rule, people do not slide directly from prevenient grace to justification without conviction for their sins. Because of that, we can get a sense of how ministry is going. Do people in your church or community experience conviction for their sins? If not, it might be worth raising the question as to whether people are really encountering God and experiencing justification.

Make no mistake, the presence of God in people's lives will highlight sin and bring conviction. In most cases, we don't even need to especially go to war with the specific sins of the people to get them to experience conviction. If people are seeking God and attempting to follow Christ, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction. In fact, the only *real* conviction that makes *real* change is the conviction of the Holy Spirit. That, of course, does not get us off the hook of real work. We do need to proclaim, in word and especially in deed, the fullness of the gospel and the radical transformation it involves. If we are really doing what we say we do in the Global Methodist Church; if we are really making disciples and spreading scriptural holiness across the globe, we shouldn't be a bit surprised if people experience conviction. We should be more surprised if people *don't*. Maybe not everyone will feel conviction, and it will probably impact different people at different times and in different ways, but we should not try to avoid it, because the only way to avoid conviction is to avoid the gospel altogether.



Year End Statistics

As we celebrate the New Year, let us also celebrate all that God has done this past year in the Upper Midwest Conference!

We ask that someone from each church take a few minutes to gather the information for the questions listed below and then submit it via the 2025 End of Year Statistical Form using the button below.

*Please submit your church's information by **Monday, February 16, 2026**.*

Here are the Questions on the Form:

1. Total number of Professing Members.
2. Total number of Baptisms (Baptisms in 2025, not counting remembrances of baptism).
3. Total Professions of Faith (New members who joined not by transfer from another church).
4. Average In-person Worship Attendance of Your Primary Services (Only count those in the service).
5. Average Households Who Worship Online (Number of views over a minute the week the service was live).
6. Number of Adults Involved In Classes, Bands, Accountability Groups and Small Groups (Not total attendance, but individuals involved).
7. Average Attendance of Youth in Discipleship Ministries (Ages 12-18).
8. Average Attendance of Kids in Discipleship Ministries (Ages 0-11).
9. Number of People Serving in Missions (Mission trips, Compassion and Evangelism Ministries with a purpose of serving people not connected to the local church, etc.).
10. Total Operating Income

This report is a time to celebrate and document all the ways God has shown up, shown out, and exceeded your expectations this past year.

Link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSftnifiTfxA8Qg0YZ1gS2yG6pAiQ_l2_HpdekNUe3aXSP8w/viewform



new mailing address
effective immediately

Please make sure the Treasurer
of your Church has this im-
portant information.

We Have A New Mailing Address!
Our new mailing address for the Upper Midwest Conference
including **Connectional Funding payments** is:

Upper Midwest Conference
PO Box 113
Enon, OH 45323

Please begin using this address effective immediately and
bear with us
as payments sent recently to the old address may be de-
layed in processing and clearing your bank due to mail for-
warding.

**SAVE
THE
DATE**



2026 Upper Midwest Annual Conference

June 19-21, 2025
at the Convention Center
in Sioux City, IA
*More details, including registration
& hotel information, coming in March.*

2026 General Conference



As we look ahead to the 2026 Global Methodist Church General Conference, you won't want to miss the latest updates and resources being shared!

■ The **Beauty of Holiness 2026** website is your go-to destination for news, event details, registration information, and insights to help you prepare for this historic gathering of Methodists from around the world.

Visit www.beautyofholiness2026.org to stay informed, get inspired, and join the movement of spreading scriptural holiness across the globe.

Prayer for General Conference 2026

Please pray the following prayer points for the 2026 General Conference gathering of the Global Methodist Church:

WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT for all Conferences as they prayerfully select and nominate individuals to serve on General Conference Commissions. May their choices be led by the Holy Spirit, guided by God's will, and rooted in a desire to advance the mission of the Church.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,*

and he will make your paths straight." – Proverbs 3:5-6

PETITIONS brought forth will reflect the movement of the Holy Spirit and help shape the Global Methodist Church into the Church God is calling us to become.

*"For we are God's handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do." – Ephesians 2:10*

Link to the Conference Prayer Calendar:

<https://irp.cdn-website.com/a4829cd2f/files/uploaded/January-February+prayer+guides---Flyer.pdf>



Sign up for our Upper Midwest Newsletter
<https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/newsletter>

****Note:** The Deadline for Newsletter Articles/Info
is the 20th of the Month.



February 16, 2026
End of Year Stats Needed By
June 19-21, 2026
Upper Midwest Annual Conference
August 30-September 5, 2026
General Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa
View the full Upper Midwest Conference Calendar.
<https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/calendar?view=list>



Global Methodist Church Across the Globe Newsletter
<https://www.globalmethodist.org/connect>

Don't miss out on the latest updates, inspiration, and more—delivered straight to your inbox. Sign up now!

Upper Midwest Prayer Opportunities



The Upper Midwest Conference Daily Noon Prayer

Can you imagine what would happen in the spiritual realm if we prayed the same prayer together at noon daily?

Join Us and Let's Find Out!

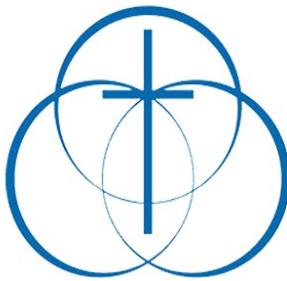
<https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/>

Scheduled Zoom Prayer Meetings

Please click the button below and let us know that you would like to join and we will send you the link.

Monthly on the 3rd Tuesday
@7:00 PM (CST)

prayer@uppermidwestgmc.org



GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH UPPER MIDWEST CONFERENCE

Lovingly walk alongside laity and clergy as they make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly and witness boldly.

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