



GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH UPPER MIDWEST CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER

Early Edition

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History Makers

by Rev. James Parks,

Upper Midwest Conference Superintendent

A few weeks ago, our Cabinet and additional leaders gathered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for training with the International Leadership Institute (ILI) as part of their History Makers initiative. This training is being used across the Global Methodist

Church and around the world. Its vision is clear and compelling: **to change history by accelerating the spread of the Gospel through leaders of leaders empowered by the Holy Spirit.**



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The training centers on eight core values: Intimacy with God, Passion for the Harvest, Visionary Leadership, Culturally Relevant Evangelism, Multiplication of Leaders, Family Priority, Faithful Stewardship, and Integrity. Growing in these areas shapes us not only as leaders, but as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

At the heart of this training is a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit. As we strengthen our personal spiritual disciplines, we are invited into a lifelong journey of holiness. This means drawing near to God and allowing Him to align our hearts with His.

From that foundation comes multiplication. These values are not meant to be kept, but shared. As we pass them on, we can form classes, bands, and small groups that encourage one another in faithful living. With a shared understanding of our mission, we are better equipped to plant seeds, cultivate growth, and participate in the harvest God is bringing.

. In the Upper Midwest, we are called not only to grow as disciples of Jesus, but to become disciples who make disciples. **God is inviting us to intentionally connect with others and lead them into a fruitful, life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ.**

Our Cabinet and leadership team will continue with follow-up training, but this is not just for a few; it is an invitation for all. If you are interested in learning more, please connect with your presiding elder to hear how your district is seeking to accelerate the spread of the Gospel.





When Hunger Met Heaven: We Don't Get because We Don't Ask God?

by Rev. Dr. Christina Sung,
Conference Prayer Team Leader

Practicing Muslims pray five times daily (Salat) at specific times every day from dawn to night. Salat is a requirement. I took pictures of a Muslim praying at an airport in China, where hundreds of people waited to board. A young white man headed toward the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Although this was not my first time seeing a Muslim man praying in public, his faith action challenged me; Am I bold enough to share my faith in Jesus in any form or way in public, like him? Do I pray diligently?

Open Door's World Watch 2026 Report reads that more than 388 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution. Roughly 5,600 Christians were murdered, more than 6,000 were detained or imprisoned, and another 4,000-plus were kidnapped. More than 5,000 churches and their facilities were destroyed. The top 10 persecuted countries are: #1 North Korea, #2 Somalia, #3 Yemen, #4 Sudan, #5 Eritrea, #6 Syria, #7 Nigeria, #8 Pakistan, #9 Libya, #10 Iran.

Here is a testimony to the power of prayer, written by a North Korean, that I found on a Mission agency's website. Seun met Han in China, across a river from North Korea, who gave 100 yuan (\$13) and asked her to do unusual things: write down the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. And the lady said, 'When you return to North Korea, pray these words again and again, and God answers your prayer.'" Seun didn't fully understand what it meant, but remembered it. Back in N. Korea, the money and food ran out, and there was nothing to eat. She was desperate. One night, she shut every door, covered the windows with blankets, and whispered the words Han wrote down in China. One day, after repeating the Lord's Prayer many times, she closed her prayer, saying her own trembling plea: "God, I am hungry. Please give me rice." It was the first time she had ever prayed. She fell asleep with an empty stomach.

The next freezing morning, she opened her door and found four pounds of noodles. "It felt like an earthquake in my head," Seun wondered who could give the noodles. Days later, no food. She prayed the Lord's prayer again. The next morning, a woman came and gave her a sack of rice, saying her rice sack had torn and spilled the rice on the ground, making them dirty. She had no time to wash the rice, and she brought it to Seun to have it. Seun held the sack in her hands, stunned, thinking there must be something to this, and kept praying the prayer. For a year and a half, provision came—again and again—in ways she couldn't explain. Each answer deepened her curiosity and her trust in God. Later, when she encountered the words of Romans 10, she said, "I prayed even though I did not fully know who God is, and God heard me and answered my prayers." Please know that in North Korea, if it is discovered that you are a Christian, you will face imprisonment in a labor camp for life or the death penalty.

Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). What does God speak to you through Seun's testimony? Perhaps we don't get it because we did not ask!? Do we take God so much for granted? Don't we have answers because we don't pray? Would you include the persecuted nations and their people in our prayers?



Thoughts on Mission Trips,

Blessman Wells Update, and More!

By Norma Morrison, Conference Missions Team

As summer approaches, we are reaching a season where churches will be sending teams all over the world to serve on mission trips. I've been on many over the years - as far away as Mexico, Cuba, Paraguay, and South Africa. Every time the teams said how much more they received than what they gave. I think that's how God means it to be.

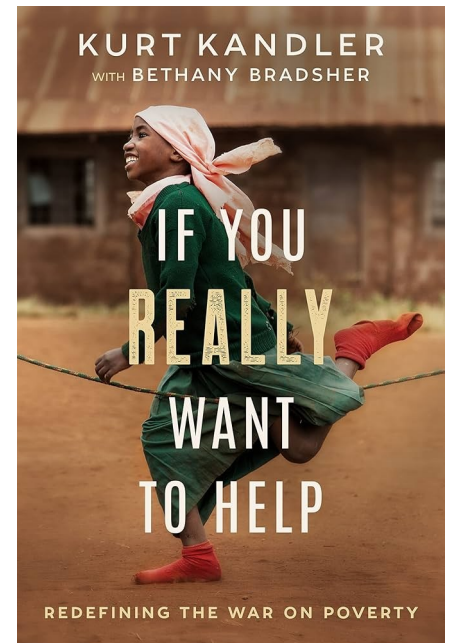
I recently took a training from Kurt Kandler, the author of the book **If You REALLY Want to Help**. I gained new insights and much to ponder as we seek to serve. It reminded me how important our motivations are, and sometimes, without realizing it, our motivation to serve is because it makes us feel good.

Do we look at our mission trips as partnerships with those we serve? As we provide for material and spiritual needs, what do they have to share with us? Can they show us how to disciple, how to have joy in hardship? Do we give them that opportunity to share?

Let them have the privilege of giving to us!

Many of us have prayed Bob Pierce's prayer (the founder of World Vision). "Let my heart be broken, Lord, for the things that break Your heart." And my heart has been broken over and over as I've witnessed both extreme material and spiritual poverty at home and abroad. And that makes missions a priority for me. But...

"We aren't called to just do missions; we are called to be on mission every day. Missions isn't a ministry of the church; missions IS the church. We don't attend mission trips; we live on mission. We don't pick and choose if we want to be a part of it— we ARE part of it because Jesus has sent us. Let's live sent!" (Lion of Judah Facebook post).



Blessman Wells Project Update

We are on our way to our \$37,500 goal to dig 3 wells in South Africa for 3 children's centers! As we provide for this great material need, we will also be blessed as a Conference coming together for a common goal. This note from the Wallace Church says it so well. "We appreciated the information in the newsletter so we could be aware of the chance to participate in this project." It's not too late for YOUR church to join us!

Do we look at our mission trips as partnerships with those we serve? As we provide for material and spiritual needs, what do they have to share with us? Can they show us how to disciple, how to have joy in hardship? Do we give them that opportunity to share?

Donations can be given online at <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 make your check out to: Upper Midwest Conference and 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.

Missions Resources:

Go to www.blessmaninternational.org for information and to sign up for the upcoming Mission Trip to South Africa.

Find our Facebook Group– [Upper Midwest GMC – Missions](#) and ask to join

Share this short video about the need for wells: <https://youtu.be/EgeEq8C-5bO>

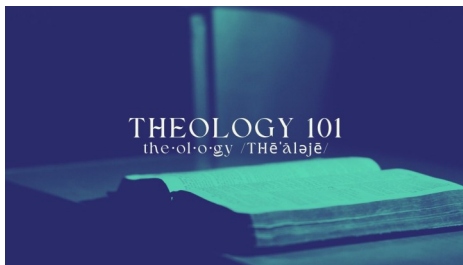
Donate as a congregation or individual for the Blessman Wells Project.

To give online: Visit our [Online Giving page](#) and designate it for the South Africa Partnership Fund; add a memo that says “Well.”

For mailed donations, note "South Africa Partnership Fund – Well" on your giving form or check.

Mail checks to Upper Midwest Conference, PO Box 113, Enon, OH 45323.

Contact us at missions@uppermidwestgmc.org for questions.



Sanctification and Holiness

By Rev. Dr. Travis Stevick • Pastor, Grace Methodist Church, Marcus, IA

[YouTube.com/tstevick1](https://www.youtube.com/tstevick1) • travisstevick.substack.com

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

– Philippians 4:4 NIV

Last month, we looked at the New Birth and ended with a promise to continue our consideration about what comes after that New Birth. We do that this month.

The term associated with this phase of the Christian life is “sanctification.” It is the process by which we are made holy. When we speak about “Scriptural Holiness,” this is ultimately what we are talking about. It is the process by which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made to be more and more like Christ.

This connection with Christ is crucial. Sanctification and Holiness are not fuzzy or unclear ideas that we can fill with whatever we want. That is to say, it is not simply “being a good person,” doing certain things, or avoiding certain things. It is about speaking, acting, and being more and more like how Jesus would be, speak, and act, if he were in your place with your background, gifts, and skills. If we ever treat holiness as if it is mostly about doing this or that, or not doing this or that, we weaken the connection between holiness and Jesus. This connection must be preserved because any would-be holiness that is not connected to Christ is necessarily a kind of legalism, not true holiness.

This is one of the crucial distinctive aspects of the Wesleyan tradition. It isn’t that nobody else in church history has felt that sanctification is important; however, many Protestants focus so much on justification, or “being forgiven,” that sanctification can seem like an afterthought. By contrast, Wesley felt that it was the whole point of the Christian life. Comparing “religion” (by which he meant Christian faith) to a house, Wesley wrote: *“Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself.”* (*Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained; VI.4*)

The traditional Protestant distrust of “works” is reasonable. Today, just like in the 16th century, there is a temptation to think that God accepts us because we do more good than bad, or for some other reason that focuses on what we do. It was important to re-center the importance of trust in Christ. Indeed, even with sanctification and holiness, it isn’t really something that we achieve with our hard work. It is letting God live God’s life in us and through us more and more (Galatians 2:20). However, we do have a role to play in this growth in holiness.

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Jesus frequently compares us to plants, to trees that bear fruit. The thing about living things is that they grow. Living plants grow and also bear fruit. The only way for a plant to not bear its fruit is if it is either dead or else unhealthy in some significant way. Further, though a farmer cannot force a plant to grow if it is not healthy, they can ensure they set things up for success. They can make sure the seed is good before planting, make sure the soil is ready, make sure that the ground is fertilized, make sure the weeds are pulled, and make sure that insects and fungus don't take hold. Much work can be done. In fact, the farmer who refuses to do the work that they can do will almost certainly end up without a crop.

This is important because people sometimes act as if the fact that God is the one who sanctifies us means that we cannot do anything or even that we should not do anything. The scripture, with its persistent calls for holiness, wouldn't make much sense if there was nothing for us to do. However, the things we do are like the work of the farmer. We cannot force the growth, but we can get obstacles out of the way, we can guard against things, influences, and habits that interrupt the growing process.

The crop analogy is particularly apt. Things don't happen, in general, on a timeline of days but of weeks, months, and years. If the land has not been tended to, if crops are grown without nourishing the soil with fertilizer, the crops will decrease in their yield. Not overnight, but over time. In the same way, if the land has been neglected, steps can be taken to prepare it to be fruitful again, but you aren't going to get it there overnight.

The Wesleyan stress on sanctification and holiness is sometimes, then and now, claimed to be a kind of "works righteousness," but nothing could be further from the truth. If we are seeking to be saved by our works, what we are hoping for is that by doing the right things, regardless of our relationship with Jesus, God will accept us because of those works. What Wesley was talking about were the fruits of faith, the things that naturally spring out of a life of faith. However, because this holiness and sanctification is indeed the natural result of faith, it was important that we do indeed grow in holiness. To continue to identify as a Christian indefinitely without growing in holiness is, in the Wesleyan tradition, a contradiction in terms. You don't need fruit to be loved by God; you don't need good works to be accepted by God. However, if you continue as a Christian, you must begin to bear fruit and have that fruit grow over time.

Some readers might be thinking, "Now hold on a minute. What if someone comes to faith at the end of their lives? What if they have neither time nor opportunity to show fruit?" That set of circumstances is certainly possible, and Wesley would say that a person in that situation is surely saved without any fruit.

That being said, this situation is probably less common than we might think. After all, the thief on the cross came to trust in Jesus in the final moments of his life, nailed in place and actively dying, and even he could bear witness to Jesus and his victory over the sin of humanity (Luke 23:39-43). We sometimes say "I didn't have a chance" when what we mean to say is that we did not take the chance. If you have been a Christian for any length of time and your life is indistinguishable from what your life would be like without Jesus, it is crucial that you recommit yourself to Christ, repent, and believe the gospel.

Think about what it would mean if we could really be Christians without God transforming our lives. It would mean that we can be putting our trust in Christ, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God himself, and obeying by grace the commands of God, all without any fruit becoming manifest. It is true that this growth may not always happen as fast as it should, or as fast as we might like it to, but it must happen, or else it raises the question as to whether we really do trust Christ, whether we really do have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us, and whether we really do want to obey God.

To put it simply, Wesley taught that if we do not have some evidence that our lives have been changed and are found in Christ, it is hard to say that we are actually saved. This brings us up to the topic for next month, where we will consider what it means to be assured of our salvation in this life.



Be Sure to Register TODAY!

Registration is now open for the 2026 Annual Conference in Sioux City! The \$120 conference fee includes Saturday lunch and light snacks. For more details and to secure your spot go to:

<https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3465716>.

2026 Annual Conference Information Update

Friday - Sunday, June 19-21, 2026

at the Sioux City Convention Center in Sioux City, IA

You're Invited!

Please view your invitation from James Parks at:

<https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fuppermidwestgmc.us18.list-manage.com%2Ftrack%2Fclick%3Fu%3D64124f1d5b1170491dea9f3cf%26id%3D9c31a43096%26e%3Dcf0d94bb0f&data=05%7C02%7C%7Ce894cf8155b6434b449e08de955e13e2%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C639112428496501246%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuM-DAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMilskFOLjoiTWFPbCIsIldUljoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=BWL5xwJHQSj0V28MF5Lla1k9mYk5BPFQY%2FndFizFY2Q%3D&reserved=0>

Young Adult/Youth Discount

For this year's conference, a \$60 discount code is available for young adult and youth participants. If you are 40 years old or younger, apply the code YA40 before completing your registration to receive the \$60 discount.

Breakout Highlights

A Sneak peek of a couple of Breakouts being offered at 2026 Annual Conference. You won't want to miss it, Register NOW!



AI and the Church

This will be a workshop/discussion about AI and the Church. We will talk about some very basic questions like what is AI, and what are some of the ways you can learn how to utilize it? What are my options for platforms and what are some easy and quick things AI may be able to help with to bring about more effective ministry and service to the congregation?

But we will also talk about some of the limits and potential dangers of misusing AI, and talk briefly about how we might think about the work of the Holy Spirit and AI-- for example, how could or should a pastor use it in helping create a sermon? How should a teacher use it in developing curriculum? Examples will be given.

This session is being led by a philosopher, not a tech-guru, so set your expectations appropriately-- if you've never used AI at all, you will still find the session useful I believe. If you are an AI expert, we look forward to your contribution to the discussion!

GuideStone Benefit Overview

GuideStone will be providing an overview of life and health benefits accessible to Clergy. This includes programs designed to enhance the benefit experience and reduce member out of pocket cost.



Cody Gonzales

Leadership Encounter

What is Leadership Encounter?

Not a “required” extra day of annual conference! Not a workshop, strategy session, or meeting! NOPE!

Leadership Encounter has been designed by a half dozen pastors from several states in the Upper Midwest Conference in response to the concern raised by many in our 7-state Conference: **“We just don’t know each other yet!”**

Growing our Conference and her ministries will happen at the speed of relationship, and relationship takes time, so the **Leadership Encounter** was conceived to enhance relationship growth. The timing is pragmatic. Global Methodists from Rushmore to the Mississippi plan to be in Sioux City in June; thus, the days preceding Annual Conference seemed the most economical regarding time and cost.

The event is designed for Pastors and lay persons to come together to “know and be known” to each other, make connections across the Upper Midwest Conference, be in fellowship, laugh, pray, worship, and praise God for who and what we are.

Wesley Global Methodist Church in Sioux City will graciously host. On Wednesday, June 17th, the doors will open at 6:30 PM with the program beginning promptly at 7 PM. Thursday, June 18th, doors will open at 9 AM. Programming for lay and clergy will begin at 9:30 AM and continue through our *free to you* lunch, after which we ask lay people to excuse themselves as the clergy will gather for a special afternoon session from 1:30 to 4:30 for clergy connection.

Please sign up for the Leadership Encounter when you register for Annual Conference.

Annual Conference Hospitality Volunteer

Help welcome and support attendees at Annual Conference by greeting guests, offering directions, and assisting as needed. A friendly presence and willing heart make all the difference—no experience required.

Contact Elizabeth Pierson to volunteer: Elizabeth can be contacted at sessions@uppermidwestgmc.org

Hotel Accommodations

A limited number of rooms are available at select local hotels with exclusive discounted rates for June.

Courtyard by Marriott 1-712-292-6893 Ask for Global Methodist Annual Conference Discount

Hilton Garden Inn Riverfront 1-712-261-6878 Ask for Global Methodist Annual Conference Discount

DoubleTree by Hilton 1-877-402-1980 Ask for Global Methodist Annual Conference Discount

Marriott Riverfront 1-402-284-4476 Ask for Global Methodist Annual Conference Discount

Annual Conference Opportunities for Special Gatherings

If you or your team want to host a special gathering at Annual Conference this year, let us know, and we will reserve a meeting room for you! You, your team, or district handle the details, and we will promote it for you.

Meeting time options

- Thursday, Friday, or Saturday evening (districts, conference/ministry teams, etc.) can meet off-site at a restaurant or at the convention center. If meeting at the convention center for dinner, all food has to be ordered through the convention center, and you have to have contacted the Conference Planning Team at least a month before Annual conference for food ordering.
- Saturday morning gatherings. (You can simply meet, or you can offer a breakfast gathering with food ordered through the convention center and paid for by your team) You can also arrange to meet off-site and let us know where you are meeting, and we will promote that.

Contact Elizabeth Pierson to get your gathering on the schedule. Elizabeth can be contacted at sessions@uppermidwestgmc.org or by calling 218-371-8352.



Thursday, June 18, 2026
at 5:00 PM in the Dining Room of
Wesley Global Methodist Church in Sioux City, IA

Clergy and Spouses You Are Invited!

The **Wesley Global Methodist Church of Sioux City, IA** is hosting a Clergy and Spouse Appreciation Banquet as a way of blessing the clergy and their spouses of the Upper Midwest Conference.

Please Note:

This special dinner is complimentary, but is **limited to the first 150 registrants**. Please be sure to register both the clergy member and their spouse.

Register at <https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3550793>



CONGRATULATIONS!

New Appointments, Assignments and Moving to Senior Status

Andrea Schadel *Assigned to Bassett & Springview, NE*

David Bracht-Wagner *Appointed to Heritage in Waverly, IA*

Mike Jager *Appointed to Dunkerton, IA*

GLOBAL METHODIST ANNOUNCEMENTS

2026 Upper Midwest Delegation Update: Episcopal Nominee Update

The General Conference Delegation was tasked with discerning up to two nominees to stand for election as bishop at General Conference 2026, one from within our conference and one from outside the conference. To guide this process, the delegation invited nominations from voting members of the Annual Conference, and several names were submitted.

As this is a new episcopal election process, this was our first time walking through it together. A key goal of this approach is to emphasize prayerful discernment and a sense of calling, rather than a traditional model of campaigning or running for election. The delegation sought to approach this work with that spirit throughout.

The delegation developed written and interview questions and engaged in a series of Zoom interviews with selected candidates. A two-thirds vote was required for nomination.

After prayerful consideration, the delegation did not select a nominee from within our conference. However, they did nominate Rev. Forbes Matonga of Zimbabwe as a candidate from outside the conference. You can view the full list of episcopal nominees at <https://www.bearutyofholiness2026.org/global-methodist-church-announces-preliminary-list-of-episcopal-nominees-for-general-conference-2026> If you have further questions on this process, please reach out to Rev. James Parks, the chair of our delegation, at jamesp@uppermidwestgmc.org.

In addition, the delegation selected two individuals to represent our conference on our Area Committee on Episcopacy: Rev. Ross Reinhiller and Becky Heeren. On May 30, they will join representatives from other conferences in our Episcopal Area, assigned by the Global Episcopacy Committee, to prayerfully discern the top five candidates for our episcopal leadership from the full list of nominees.

For more information about the episcopal election process, please visit: <https://www.bearutyofholiness2026.org/episcopal-elections>



General Conference Website

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:

THE HOLY SPIRIT would guide and direct all placement of delegates on each legislative committee at General Conference according to His purposes.

MUCH PARTICIPATION among our churches and annual conferences in the upcoming 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting for General Conference 2026.

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." -2 Chronicles 7:14

GOD TO PREPARE the hearts of our delegates, leaders, and volunteers who will be serving at General Conference 2026.

"One day, as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.' So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way." -Acts 13:2-3

"Go to the following website to take part in the May-July prayer guide:

https://irp.cdn-website.com/4829cd2f/files/uploaded/2026-02-04_May_PrayerGuides_English.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.



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!



June 19–21, 2026
Upper Midwest Annual Conference
August 30–September 5, 2026
General Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa
November 12–24, 2026
Conference Mission Trip to South Africa
View the full Upper Midwest Conference Calendar.

<https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/calendar?view=list>

We want to celebrate the great things happening throughout our conference. Whether it's happening in Districts, Conference-Wide, or in Local Churches - share how the Holy Spirit is moving in ministry around you. Fill out this simple form, and we'll highlight these stories on social media for our Upper Midwest Conference. Go to the following for the form to fill out: <https://form.jotform.com/242467999461171>



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!

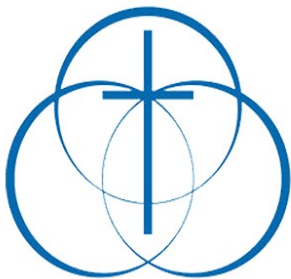
<https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/prayer>

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
at 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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