**Annual Conference Information Sessions**

**Questions and Answers**

In the latter part of May, information sessions were held for conference members to learn more about legislation that will be coming to the floor for consideration. Please review this Q & A document as you are preparing for the 54th session of our Annual Conference.

**Recommendation #1: Conference Rules**

1. **Does the name change of UMW mean that women of ANY faith can participate?**
   1. This is not a name change that is being accomplished or proposed by this action, rather it is just a change to reflect the name change that the organization has already made. Find out more about United Women of Faith at their website: <https://uwfaith.org/>.
2. **Who will be bringing the motion to adopt Recommendation #1 and the motion suspend the rules for the purposes of considering the 2024 budget at the anticipated special annual conference in October?**
   1. We anticipate that Rules Committee Chair Rev. Brian Gath will move the rule changes and the motion to suspend the rules.
3. **Will these motions require a second?**
   1. The motion to adopt Recommendation #1 does not require a second. A motion to suspend the rules does require a second.
4. **What matters can a Local Pastor vote on?**
   1. See Page 9 of the Book of Reports for a table that shows when lay and clergy have voice and vote.

**Recommendation #2: Board of Pensions & Health Benefits**

1. **Will there be an increase in HRA funding?** 
   1. The HRA funding amount increased by 3% for 2023. The Board of Pension will consider and act on a rate for 2024 in the Fall.
2. **How much in lump sum would someone ending their conference relationship receive?**
   1. The lump sum amount is based on a retiree’s current benefit level, their age, and the age of their spouse, if applicable. The younger the retiree and their spouse, the larger the lump sum payment. If someone is eligible for the benefit but many years away from age 65, the benefit amount might total a few hundred dollars or a few thousand dollars. Young, married retirees who are just 65 might see a payment of more than $20,000.
3. **What is VIA Benefits?** 
   1. Via Benefits is the name of the retiree healthcare program that funds Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRA’s). It allows plan participants to choose plans and services that make the most sense for them and the premiums or out of pocket expenses can be paid with HRA balances.
4. **What has changed from the 2022 recommendation?**
   1. Three things changed. The Pre82 retiree plan increases to $650 from $636 for each service year in that plan. With clergy ending their conference relationships related to disaffiliation matters, new language clarifies eligibility to continue on the conference health insurance plan. Finally, there are several places where the year was updated to 2024 from 2023.
5. **What does the increase in the Past Service Rate (PSR) mean?**
   1. A retired pastor or their surviving spouse receives the new amount ($650) for each year of service in the plan up through 1982. Subject to plan amendments, the Ministerial Pension Plan (MPP) and Clergy Retirement Security Plan (CRSP) followed the Pre-82 plan. Upon retirement, those who were eligible and enrolled in the pension plan will receive income from the plan in place for each year of their service. Many clergy have a few years each in the Pre-82, MPP and CRSP plans. Clergy receive a single monthly pension payment deposit to their checking account from Wespath. In addition to the pension plan, most clergy have invested their own funds in the United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP). UMPIP is a 403(b) defined contribution plan (which is like a 401(k) plan but for nonprofits). Retirees may receive regular monthly distributions from their UMPIP, or lump sums as needed.
6. **Why is the retiree housing exclusion important and how does it work?**
   1. Retired clergy can continue to benefit from the IRS clergy housing allowance. The amount of their housing allowance equals the amount Wespath reports as retirement income on the 1099-R pensioners receive each year. Clergy may exclude from income the lesser of their qualified housing expenses or the amount reported on the 1099-R they receive from Wespath.

**Recommendation #3: Board of Equitable Compensation**

1. **What increase in minimum compensation was approved for 2023?**
   1. The 2022 Annual Conference approved a 3% increase to minimum compensation.
2. **Did the Commission on Equitable Compensation consider the cost of healthcare when deciding on a minimum salary?** 
   1. The Commission did consider the rising cost of healthcare, but it was not a major focus on this year’s recommendation.
3. **What is the difference between a charge and a station?** 
   1. All churches are part of a charge, and some charges have multiple churches. A station is a charge with one church. Station is a rarely used term.
4. **If a charge were to become a station, what would be the impact on the station’s eligibility for an Equitable Compensation grant?**
   1. Because of the change in the status of the charge, the station (church) the clergy was serving would not be eligible for five years.

**Recommendation #4: Camps and Retreats**

1. **Is there a buyer for the camps?**
   1. No. Under the Book of Discipline, camp property may be sold only with the approval of the Annual Conference. It would be premature to market or identify buyers for camp property. Should the Annual Conference approve the sale of camp property, we will retain a firm with expertise in marketing faith-based properties, including camps.
2. **Can Recommendation #4 be amended?** 
   1. Yes. Once the sponsor of a recommendation moves the legislation, amendments and other actions may be taken subject to Annual Conference rules that are patterned on Robert’s Rules of Order.
3. **Can timber sales provide the needed revenue?** 
   1. Timbering has occurred at Camp Otterbein about three times in the past 10 years. The recommended practice is to not harvest in successive years. Revenue was approximately $100,000 each time. While helpful, it is not enough to change the financial analysis.
4. **Can you be more specific about what the proceeds from property sales would support?**
   1. Recommendation #4 states that proceeds from the sale of camps will support camping and next generation ministries.
5. **Given development near some camps, will the market value of the sites be re-evaluated at the time of listing for sale?** 
   1. The broker price opinion is just that, an opinion of the range of sales price that might be achieved. It is possible that there will not be a listing price for the camp properties. Another approach is to market open bidding, which allows for negotiating the best offer. In any event, the market value is the amount a buyer is willing to spend to acquire property when the conference is a willing seller.
6. **If campers from Wesley were shifted to Otterbein in 2022, does that mean Otterbein would be a better camp to retain**?
   1. Not necessarily. The reason for the 2022 mid-summer shift had to do with operational and staffing challenges. Pre-summer registrations were higher at Camp Wesley than at Camp Otterbein.
7. **What are the improvements needed at the camps?**
   1. There is a difference between improvements and catching up with deferred maintenance. The reserve study completed by Association Reserves, an industry certified reserve organization referred to the Conference by AAnthony assessed how much in reserves are needed to address immediate needs to existing structures and the amount needed to maintain the camps as originally built for the next 30 years. It calculates when appliances and roofs and driveways and mechanicals will need replacing based on the current age. The study did not assess the cost of updating facilities to competitive 2022 standards.
8. **What were the reasons Camp Wesley was chosen as the one to invest in?**
   1. Camp Wesley’s topography is more suited to multi-generational use than the hilly nature of Camp Otterbein. Regarding residential camping experience, Camp Wesley has more housing capacity than Otterbein or Widewater. Camp Wesley is more centrally located in the conference. Historically, Camp Wesley has seen more missional usage within West Ohio and Camp Wesley’s physical infrastructure is closer to its end of life than the other two camps, which means new investment is more cost effective.
9. **Aren’t user groups a way to increase revenue?**
   1. User groups may involve more people but the revenue they generate does not cover costs.
10. **What happens if this recommendation does not pass?** 
    1. Trustees will continue to protect the properties with necessary maintenance and liability protection. Other committees will need to decide what programming can occur and with what budget. Not passing this does not mean residential camps will occur in the future.
11. **Why is this recommendation coming now?**
    1. We need to confront this moment. There are 10% (300,000) fewer youth in Ohio than there were 20 years ago. The numbers of West Ohio churches, members, attendees, and youth are all declining  Meanwhile, camp maintenance, camp operations, and capital expenses continue to grow. The confluence of these trends means current practices are not sustainable.
12. **Do the camp properties have use restrictions?** 
    1. There are no known deed restrictions on any of the camp properties. Nevertheless, full title searches have been ordered for all camp parcels.
13. **How was the suspension of summer 2023 residential camp programming connected to Recommendation #4?**
    1. The two decisions are not connected. The Board of Trustees voted to affirm the committee’s recommendation at its February 17 meeting and the recommendation was submitted by the March 1 deadline. The decision to suspend summer residential camp programming was made in mid-April. Further, camp programming decisions are not subject to Trustees oversight.
14. **Did the study look at the surrounding tourism and activities for each camp?** 
    1. No, the reserve study was on the physical assets of the property. The committee did consider other criteria when determining what camp it would recommend retaining and investing in.
15. **What are the carrying costs for all three camps in 2023?** 
    1. Generally carrying costs for any unprogrammed property can be extensive. We will take steps to limit utility costs, focus maintenance on safety and health issues, provide regular inspections and adequate insurance. We will continue to depreciate capitalized improvements which totals about $155,000 in 2023.
16. **What is the budgeted expense for camps?**
    1. 2022 Operating and non-operating expenses totaled $1,451,622 million and revenue (support), including registrations totaled $489,836. Apportionments and reserves covered the $961.786 difference (apportionment support was budgeted at $568,000). This level of support makes camps the largest conference program budget.
17. **What are the current trends in summer campers?**
    1. In 2017-2019, there were 960, then 988, and 1043 campers. In 2020 there were none. In 2021, attendance totaled 657 and then in 2022, 533. Over this period of declining enrollment, operating expenses increased causing the net cost per camper to triple from 2017 to 2022.
18. **How much does each camper cost?**
    1. If no apportionments were available in 2022 and expenses were the same, camper registrations would have needed to be $1,800 more per camper.
19. **Has the Conference looked at working with other denominations?**
    1. The Ohio Council of Churches, of which the West Ohio Conference is a member, convened a conversation about funding camps in March, which are proving challenging for all denominations. East Ohio is currently operating three camps. After learning of suspended residential programming in 2023, a dozen other camp organizations in Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania reached out to see if seasonal staff was available and looking for employment, as they too were struggling to find summer staff.
20. **How much could the two camps be sold for?**
    1. A recent broker price opinion suggests Camp Widewater might be sold for $1.0 to $1.5 million and Camp Otterbein for $1.7 to $2.5 million. There are no known buyers because there is no authority to sell the camps unless the Annual Conference approves. The Trustees do have a marketer in mind to list the property should Recommendation #4 be approved.
21. **Are you thinking of tabling or withdrawing Recommendation #4?**
    1. The Board of Trustees authorized the Chair, Dr. Julie Hurtig, to take that action if it was in the best interest of the Conference. Dr. Hurtig has not concluded whether that action will be taken.
22. **Why is the capital campaign not restricted to only camps and retreats?**
    1. The current expectation is that all funds raised from a capital campaign will be needed to update Camp Wesley. In the event there are excess funds, it is possible they could fund other ministries for children, youth, and young adults. In all cases, the proceeds will only be used for ministry with children, youth, and young adults.
23. **User group activity seems high at Camp Widewater and the other two camps are also attractive for user groups. Could user groups be a source of additional income to help offset costs?**
    1. While camps are attractive for band and athletic camps, user group revenue is too small to maintain and properly staff.
24. **What if the Conference voted to sell all three camps?**
    1. The absence of a Conference-owned camp does not mean there would be no camping and retreat ministries or even residential camping programming. Other annual conferences rent camps and venues to convene children, youth, and young adults. Sometimes, they are properties belonging to other United Methodist annual conferences. Most annual conferences surveyed are reassessing how much they can afford to invest in camps, whether it be from apportionment support or reserves. West Ohio ranks first in the amount apportioned for camps and retreats, fully 13% more than the next highest conference, which has five properties.
25. **How were members of the Isaiah group identified and why only now are Friends of Camp Otterbein being asked their opinion?**
    1. The Isaiah Task Force was commissioned by Bishop Palmer, who asked Transformation Discipleship Team Chair Rev. Corey Perry to lead the effort. It included a cross-section of conference leaders, some who had deep knowledge of camping in general and West Ohio’s camps specifically. Members of each of the conference governance teams were involved, including three members of the Camps and Retreat lead team. Candidates were interviewed

and selected by Rev. Perry and former Director of Connectional Ministry, Rev. Dee Stickley-Miner. Each member was asked to think about the whole ministry, not just specific camps. It was intentional that no one camp had a disproportionate number of advocates.

1. **How has West Ohio collaborated with other annual conferences with strong camping programs?** 
   1. All conferences have had to navigate and make tough decisions regarding their camping programming, including those with strong camp programs. Some have a long tradition of raising funds for camps and have endowments, whereas West Ohio’s invested resources for camps are minimal given the needs. Part of the research used by the Isiah team was information regarding camping and retreat ministries across the connection. West Ohio has collaborated with East Ohio to share knowledge and strategies. That relationship allowed for 2023 camp registrants to quickly register at an East Ohio camp.
2. **It sounds like we are experiencing fewer campers, increasing expenses, and trying to be good stewards of our resources. Is that what we are doing here in a nutshell?** 
   1. Yes.

***Questions about the 2023 camping season that came up on the Recommendation #4 information sessions.***

1. **What is this about the summer camping season being suspended?** 
   1. In mid-April, concerns about our ability to safely and effectively program ten different residential summer camp experiences across all three camps led to a decision to suspend the summer camping season. Please [click here](https://youtu.be/qZ8S_cgOb9I) to see Bishop Palmer’s video.
2. **How many campers for 2023 were affected?**
   1. 125 campers from ninety-five households were set to attend camp when registration was closed in April. That is fewer than in 2022 and previous years. Residential camps peaked in the 1990’s with a little more than 3,000 campers. By 2017, under 1,000 kids attended residential summer camp. In 2022 that number had dropped to 533 campers.

1. **What programming is happening in 2023?** 
   1. The Newsnet article dated May 2, 2023, outlined summer youth programming plans.
2. **How will this summer’s Next Generation programing (VBS, Camp in a Box) be tracked?**
   1. Participating children and youth at each of the off-site locations we will provide programming for (e.g., VBS, Freedom Schools, Day Camps, Community Outreach Days) will be counted and the totals summed up at the end of the summer.
3. **What has happened to the directors of the three camps? Were they dismissed?**
   1. Their employment has or will end, and they will be departing from the properties in the coming months.
4. **Was a call put out for summer staffing needs?** 
   1. Yes, summer staffing was solicited through NewsNET and in email directly to all clergy and children/youth/family staff in the Conference in January and February.
5. **What were the summer staffing requirements?**
   1. The planned 2023 residential summer camp program called for four residential opportunities at Camps Otterbein and Wesley and two residential opportunities at Camp Widewater. All paid staff needed to be available for all eight weeks of programming, plus two weeks of training and preparation across the three locations. While volunteers are helpful and welcome, they cannot replace paid summer staff. The plan called for eight counselors, eight cooks, eight lifeguards/program staff, plus a nurse and a chaplain for each week.
6. **How was it determined that summer residential camp programming should be suspended?** 
   1. March 31st was the date set for having secured all needed summer staff. Directors recruited and navigated candidates through the hiring process. As of April 15, summer staff who had met all the requirements for hiring and confirmed their availability totaled twelve. The mix of staff would have limited all areas of programming from swimming to kitchen to counselors.