

CONFERENCE IDENTITY

GREAT LAKES

Culture Statement

The character, commitments, and shared life of the Great Lakes Annual Conference.

APPROVED	Annual Conference, June 2025
APPLIES TO	Annual Conference, Districts, and the Local Church

Introduction

We are called to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ. John Wesley reminded the people called Methodist that the world is our parish. This basic principle not only helped the Wesleys, but it also helps us today to see all of humanity as recipients of God's redeeming grace; therefore, needing to make that grace available to all. The Local Church is not a landing place, but a launching pad to spread holiness of heart and life. The Great Lakes Annual Conference gathers to be a movement of God's people, living in relationship with God and others, to make strategic connections so that people will know the redeeming power of God's love. Where there are existing GMC houses of worship, we will work to be the best vitalized expression of Christ in those communities. Where there are no local GM churches, we will seek to strategically plant new faith communities.

This document describes the culture of the Great Lakes Annual Conference (GLAC). All clergy and lay will use this document to describe the culture at all levels of the conference life — AC, district, and Local Church.

The Great Lakes AC will operate with biblical values and a Wesleyan theology. We follow the Triune God; we worship the Father, we receive the gift of salvation through faith in our Risen Savior, we live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit responding to the grace of God. Just as the One True God is a relational God, so are we a relational AC. We will have a minimal administration so as not to interfere with and instead to aid the relationships of our laity and clergy. We will keep our districts small so that the Presiding Elder can have a relationship with the clergy and the Local Church. Our Local Church exists to be and equip all — clergy and lay — to reflect the image of Jesus Christ and to be in ministry together as the Body of Christ.

Annual Conference

What is God doing and how can we join Him?

The Annual Conference (as an organization and as a gathering) will have its eyes upon the Triune God. Therefore, the questions the Annual Conference will always pose to the Local Church are: What is God Doing? How is He Creating? How is He Saving? How is He Sustaining? In response to the reporting of the Local Church, the Annual Conference will ask how can we join in what God is doing among us and help facilitate the ministry of the Local Church that we might all be challenged to grow in faithfulness.

The Annual Conference is focused on living in God's Kingdom through the Local Church. We gather for worship together to build the Body of Christ. We scatter to enable the Local Church to equip clergy and laity to be effective in witness to the Love of God and the call to faithful discipleship in the world.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we place our loyalty to God's Kingdom above the kingdoms of this world; therefore, we will be Biblical on all issues in society. We will strive for personal and social holiness. Our conference and district leadership will be chosen because of their spiritual gifts and their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

With this in mind, the Annual Conference will have a streamlined, small Conference Administration with a humble posture of serving clergy and churches. We will only ask for reports/paperwork that will be USED to help us all fulfill the mission of the church. We will be transparent in our annual reporting and in our audit reporting. We will evaluate the fruits of its actions regularly and modify those actions accordingly. The business of the Annual Conference will flow out of our worship of God.

Accountability in Shared Ministry

We are members of one another, we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We are called to be open and humble before God. We recognize that the Triune God is the source of all wisdom. Therefore, we are accountable to Him and one another for our faithfulness.

Accountability is the obligation and the willingness to accept the responsibility and consequences for one's actions.

Clergy and lay leadership will model the ability to apologize when they make mistakes. We expect the laity of the church to be co-laborers with clergy in the mission of the church; therefore, we will foster a shared community for laity and clergy, to be accountable to Christ, one another, and to our doctrine and discipline. To hold people accountable requires continual training and understanding of our common doctrinal identity.

Watching Over One Another in Love

Trust is critical to our personal and professional relationships. It is a necessary precursor to achieving credibility and respect, obtaining mutual goals, making time-sensitive decisions, and having success.

Trust begins with our trust in God, and manifests in our desire to bless one another. All members of the Great Lakes AC will strive for transparency and have a core value of mutual accountability. We can be judged by the fruit of these actions and will be accountable if the fruit does not match.

We will focus on doing Kingdom work and will celebrate new professions of faith in Jesus Christ and urge all towards mature discipleship through the work of the Holy Spirit that the image of Jesus Christ might be seen in the world.

We recognize that honest and respectful communication is key to trust.

We will be transparent about how money is used.

The Apostle Paul says (1 Cor 4:1) the Clergy are stewards of the “mysteries of God” and it is required of stewards that they be faithful; therefore, the Annual Conference will hold the Clergy accountable for their teaching and practice. It is with this same understanding there will be mutual accountability between the Annual Conference, the Local Church, and its leadership.

We will give each other expectant patience and grace as we learn to build trust.

Communication

Communication is the way we connect with God and with other people.

We are people of prayer, who seek to be led by the Lord and are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Great Lakes AC seeks constant communication with God. We will search the Scriptures and pray and we will be open to hearing God speak in the middle of it. We will model a best practice of emotionally healthy communication with the leaders, the clergy, and the Local Church. We will communicate frequently, and we recognize that the owner of the information shall communicate the information. It takes a level of trust to communicate; that communication goes two ways and there must be a willingness to receive the communication.

We will be intentional about fostering a relationship that helps people want to hear the communication. The Presiding Elder is the local voice for the conference communication. It is the duty of leaders to speak in a way that does not denigrate others and their ideas but honors and lifts up the God-image in all of us. All of us – clergy and laity – will speak truth lovingly and compassionately.

We will regularly ask what communications are needed by the Local Church and through what channels and will provide options for feedback. We will foster an atmosphere where people are free to speak truth without fear of reprisal.

Training

We exist: to be disciples of Jesus Christ, to make disciples, and to equip all lay and clergy to live in a flourishing life with our Triune God.

We are an intergenerational and an intercultural church. We will focus on being and making disciples at every age and cultural context, from the smallest child to the oldest adult.

- Nursery workers are church planters
- Help children and youth be active early and encourage the growth in faith so they can live it.
- Class meetings teach us to speak about our faith and where we see God

To support being and making disciples, the Great Lakes AC expects all clergy and laity to live and teach the Catechism of the Global Methodist Church, because what we believe helps us to understand our identity in the Triune God and guides our behavior in the midst of a fallen world. We will support finding and developing resources and discipling materials to support laity of all ages in the Local Church. We recognize the importance of an educated and informed laity and will support a focused and accessible leadership development methodology for laity that includes both robust and practical training opportunities.

Local Church

We have an audience of One: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

The Local Church is a gathering of a people, the Body of Christ. It is a living breathing entity; if it does not have life in the Spirit, it will die. It is the avenue where people can be caught by the Love of God at any time in their life. It is part of the church universal and needs to lead well. It is the channel to the community that God calls us to reach for Christ.

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together...”

HEBREWS 10:24–25

The Local Church gathers to passionately worship God so that it can scatter to do its primary work of being and making disciples of Jesus Christ through the prayer, witness, and loving care of all people. It has a sense of expectation and excitement about what God is doing / is going to do. The Local Church expects the Holy Spirit to move and embraces Holy Spirit gifts. Each Local Church is uniquely equipped to reach the community for Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In the Local Church we respect both clergy and laity. The Holy Spirit speaks through the whole church, whether clergy or laity, young or old; we listen to one another as we listen to Christ.

Clergy and Laity

Stay true to the teachings of the Bible as our wisdom – “if any of you lack wisdom, ask the Lord and He will give you wisdom.” James 1:5

The Annual Conference and the Local Church will create a culture of call for both clergy and laity. Laity are called to the shared ministry of reaching out to a lost world and being a channel of God’s grace into the lives of others. Clergy are additionally called to “a ministry of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice” as well as “Sacrament and Order” (BDD ¶ 503). We recognize that the expression of God’s call on a person can change. We support those whose calls cause them to step back from vocational ministry.

All believers are part of the Body of Christ. Clergy and laity are to respect each other and partner together. They are to begin the relationship with each other in good faith that each are called to the roles they play. The Local Church can operate only as everyone is involved; it is a ministry of the Local Church, pastor and the congregation together. Together they are to revitalize the Wesleyan heritage of transformation of men, women, youth, and children into the life of God. As transformed people they

have a vital role in the transformation of the culture and our world, bringing life out of death. This happens as all have a personal hunger for more intimacy with their Savior, joy in His Body, and compassion for the lost.

Laity are to be contributors in the Kingdom and in the Local Church. Laity participate and contribute according to their call and their gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. We recognize that laity as well as clergy share marketplace skills which are also valuable for ministry in the Local Church or the Annual Conference, which are important leadership strengths for the Body of Christ.

Clergy are called by God from among the laity for a particular service to His church, they are not a superior order of Christian. Clergy highlight and encourage the call and the leadership of the laity.

Both lay and clergy need to be in safe, accountable, and Godly relationships, in order to effectively share, encourage, and to inspire others in ministry.

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