



March 5, 2021

Dear Members and Friends of Wesley,

To say that 2020 was a challenging year would be a gross mis-statement. We have been challenged to be a congregation – a gathering of the faithful – yet we have been forced apart but thankfully for the work of our tremendous staff, we have stayed connected. Through it all the faithful giving of our Wesley family has enabled us to meet our expenses with the additional support of a portion of our endowment funds.

As a United Methodist congregation, we are joined across the world with every other United Methodist congregation through our connectional giving to the ministries of the whole church. Each year every United Methodist congregation around the church is apportioned an amount to support the work of the whole church. These are our apportionments. Wesley has had a tradition of paying its apportionment 100.0% in full. Like many other congregations, with the challenges of this year we will not be paying our \$48,000 apportionment in full. As we write it looks like we will be about \$10,000 short of our amount. Additionally, the Northern Illinois Conference has not shared any of our payments with the general church and we bear some responsibility there for not designating that our apportionments need to go to the general church funds.

For 2021, the Northern Illinois Conference, through its formula – which by the way has nothing to do with membership size as some may think – based on statistical data Wesley submits every year, that Wesley could pay over \$59,000 in apportionments or a 24% increase. This is contrary to what has been conference practice of not increasing or decreasing a church's apportionment by more than 9.0%. This is not the first time this has happened to Wesley and each time the Governing Board has gone back to the conference to reset the number based on our capacity to pay. We have been responsible in trying to help our conference know what they can expect from us and consistently, with appreciation, they have been able to count on us for that number. In addition, if we want to support the general church those are added on top making our

total apportionment raising it from \$48,000 to \$74,780 in order for Wesley to fully support the general church and the Northern Illinois Conference.

This past year has been difficult for many churches as it has been for our conference and the denomination. In the midst of that, there have been some troubling actions within our conference with which Wesley takes exception. Some of these include:

- A nominations process which summarily ended the terms of two conference lay leaders who were women – one Black and one Native American – while keeping in place the white male. All three started at the same time in a new structure and terms would all end at the same. To avoid a complete turnover, it was decided outside the prescribed nominations process, to replace the two women but keep the one white male.

- While the use of three co-conference lay leaders to spread the work around was logical when it came to the assignments for committees and groups the lone male received most of the assignments with one co-leader being on a committee to which she was already a member and the other woman serving on none. In a recent conference convocation on racism, the representative of the three conference lay leaders was the white male.

- A review of churches across our conference and their response to apportionments has indicated that some choose not to pay anything at all while others maintain a history of payments in the single digit %. There are no consequences for those who have that pattern and the conference has relied on churches like Wesley to be fully faithful and help make up the difference. Additionally, we see apportionments levels for some congregations dramatically reduced for the coming year which may be outside the formula process for adjustments.

- Over the years, as Wesley has paid in full we have trusted the conference to use our apportionments to fulfill our amount for the whole church. In 2020, none of our payments have gone to support the work of the overall denomination. It is possible to divide apportionment payments when sent to the conference but our practice has been to pay in full and as we pay for the conference to send a portion to the general church.

- The overall structural changes in the operations of the conference in past years has removed it further away from the local church in understand the realities of a local congregation and in supporting and resourcing them in their communities. Leadership positions which were once held by both clergy and lay volunteers are now combined into staffing positions paid for by our apportionment dollars.

- While the Annual Conference was reducing the number of districts and reducing support staff a staff person was added to provide support to the Conference Shepherding Team. This was not shared with the Annual Conference and the person is not listed amongst conference staff. Nevertheless, there is an individual in that newly created position adding to the costs of the Northern Illinois Conference.

The Governing Board has been considering these and other actions and have arrived at decisions on the management and capacity of Wesley for apportionments.

1. Not paying anything in apportionments is not appropriate and does not adhere to our covenant as part of the United Methodist connection. We have, however, discussed with the Conference Council on Finance and Administration Wesley's apportionments and how we will direct them to the general church funds.

2. An amount based on our current capacity has been communicated to the conference and that will be an amount that should be within our reach. This is responsible and if all the churches would commit to and meet their commitment, the conference could have a number each year to count on and to use for reality planning.

3. We will direct our apportionments to the funds of the general church. In other words, we will instruct the conference that the apportionment dollars from Wesley will be distributed to six general funds. These funds are:

- World Service -Wesley will support the core ministries of the general agencies of the United Methodist Church including United Methodist Communications, Church and Society, Global Ministries, Discipleship Resources and commissions working towards anti-racism, peace and justice and church growth around the world.
- Africa University Fund – The university in Africa which provides higher education from 25 African nations.
- Black College Fund – Wesley will be supporting 11 historically black colleges and university in the United States.
- The Episcopal Fund – Support for the bishop's overseeing the church.
- Ministerial Education Fund – We will be providing support for the 12 United Methodist seminaries in the United States.
- Interdenominational Cooperation Fund – This funds the work with other Christian communions all over the world and join them in the Christian witness to meet human suffering and to advocate for peace and justice.

There is an additional fund – General Administration which funds such things as the General Conference Session. Because of issues with the administration within the General Conference, the Northern Illinois Conference is withholding support until changes in operations have been implemented. We will respect that decision and not direct any of our funds to be sent to the Administration Fund.

The Governing Board has not taken this action in a vacuum. We have communicated with our District Superintendent and a meeting was held with him around our concerns and our response. He did not ask us to reconsider how we directed our apportionment payments and encouraged Wesley to join with others who might have similar concerns and lift them up. We have made some recommendation around the reversal of some of the discriminatory decisions made around conference leadership and how those decisions were made. We have asked that the resources committed to local churches be developed with local church input. We have suggested that while this is a time of challenge it could be a time for renewal and doing our ministries together in new and more inclusive ways. We have committed to having Wesley work with the district superintendent to move ahead with ministry in Aurora, Northern Illinois and around the world as United Methodists.