

Planning Annual Conference

It feels like we just started 2025, but in a few months we will all gather again at our Upper Midwest Annual Conference in Sioux City, Iowa, on June 13-15.

Our Session Team has been busy meeting and planning for this year's conference. We wanted to share some insight into our planning, so you all know the heart and soul behind the planning of our Annual Conference.

How does the Sessions Team operate?

-Our Session Team meets once a month. Within our Session Team, the team is split into Sub-committees: hospitality/registration, Clergy/Laity Sessions, worship/prayer/main sessions, vendors/displays, gathering or breakout times, and ordination service. For the sake of planning, we distribute the different planning details to these different sub-committees. Then once a month we gather as a Sessions Team to make sure we are all on the same page and to keep moving forward with planning decisions.

What things do we focus on as a Session Team while we are planning?

-First of all, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our decision making and planning. With the new formation of our Upper Midwest Annual Conference last year, we wanted Annual Conference to be a time of worship, prayer, refreshment, learning, growth, and gathering together as the church body in the Upper Midwest. Yes, we have to do business, but we wanted Annual Conference to be more than just a time we meet for business.

From the worship services, prayer times, break-outs, meals, and other gatherings at Annual Conference, our goal is that everyone would leave feeling refreshed and having had a positive and filling time visiting and connecting with others across our conference.

Why did we switch from a Thursday, Friday, Saturday to a Friday, Saturday, Sunday?

-After prayer, discussion, and considering conversations with others at last year's conference, the Session Team wanted to have our Annual Conference be available not just for voting laity and voting clergy, but also to make it easier for

other laity in the church and clergy spouses to get time off of work to be able to attend Annual Conference. We felt that if we are about resourcing the local church, we need to continue to build the laity.

-We also appreciate the idea of allowing clergy a Sunday away from leading worship. Our hope is that this will allow them to be more available to take in what God has for them at conference and not have their eyes on Sunday (which is always coming). We do know sometimes planning to be gone is more work than just doing it yourself, however, it is good to give the local church opportunities to lead on Sunday mornings. We also plan to offer a video message from Bishop Webb that churches could use if a local speaker is not available.

Why did we choose the theme this year of: “The Path Before Us: Walking Together in Faith”?

-Last year’s conference focused on us becoming a conference and the excitement of new connections and gathering for the first time. This year, in 2025, we are now looking toward the future of what God has planned for our conference. We are moving forward “walking together” in faith. God has a planned “path” for us, and as a conference we are moving forward into all God has planned.

What caused the registration to go up from \$90 last year to \$120 per person this year?

-2024 was our first Annual Conference, so much of the planning was guestimates. We almost covered the cost of Annual Conference with registrations and funds from the budget. The cost of the convention center went up and the cost of food has gone up. Last year we were able to bring in all our own break-time treats. This year, the convention center is under new management, and we are no longer allowed to bring in our own food: all food must be purchased through the convention center. We think this fee will help us to offer a great conference.

When I make my hotel reservation from the hotel block link, it automatically comes up with Tuesday-Sunday, why is that?

-When we created the hotel blocks, there is a calendar on the link to let you choose your dates you wish to stay. With the distance some people in our conference have

to travel, some come into town early. We want to provide the discounted rate for the dates that work best for you to come to annual conference. If you have questions about this, the hotel has been wonderful to work with on answering questions.

Will the Annual Conference always be held at the Sioux City, Iowa Convention Center?

-That is up for God's leading and guidance. We first chose Sioux City, Iowa, as the central location for a majority of the churches in our conference.

As a Session Team we wanted to create a stable foundation for our Annual Conference the first few years we meet. We wanted to have a few years of consistency and stability at one location as we gather together, grow, form as a conference, and get to know each other.

-We have been looking into and are discussing meeting in a church or a different location in 2026, that is still in the planning and God has not yet made it clear where our 2026 and 2027 Annual Conferences will be held, but the Session Team is open to having it wherever God leads.

If you have questions or concerns, please send me an email,
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Blessings,

Elizabeth Pierson

Session Team Chair