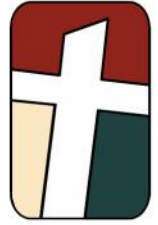


Serving the Lancaster Community Since 1884

Covenant



ECHOES Newsletter

United Methodist Church

June / July 2026



From the Pastor's Desk...

By Pastor Derrick Gutierrez

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or

Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, NIV)

We are part of a church family much larger than we realize. We often stay so focused on our own corner of the Body of Christ that we miss the beauty stretching across cultures, languages, and nations — many parts, one body. As I write this, I am somewhere in the middle of that larger body. Bishop Moore-Koikoi invited me to join a delegation traveling to Tanzania to fulfill a covenant between her Episcopal area and the United Methodist Church of Tanzania — attending their Annual Conference, leading enrichment sessions for their Pastor's School, and hosting a VBS for children from their preschool and the surrounding neighborhood. The conference was held in Morogoro — a small city about



five hours outside Dar es Salaam. As we drove toward the church through a neighborhood just outside the city, something unexpected happened. I was transported back to my childhood.

...continued next page

Sidelights

COVENANT'S VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Our Vision Statement: **Bringing Christ's Light into the Community and Beyond.**

Our Mission Statement: **We Invite, We Welcome, We Nurture, We Serve.**

WAYS TO CONTINUE GIVING

Thank you to our faithful members who continue to support Covenant Church. Here are options for you to give your personal tithes and offerings:

- Mail checks to 110 N. Mulberry St., Lancaster, PA, 17603
- Give online. Go to our website www.covenant-umc.com and click on the GIVING link and follow the directions.
- Text 717-769-1063. After the initial setup, giving is easy.

Please call the church office with questions.

Sidelights

PRAYER CHAIN

Covenant is a praying church. There are times when an urgent or emergency concern may arise in your life. Covenant has a Prayer Chain ready to jump into immediate action to notify our Prayer Warriors to lift that concern up to God.

This phone call system is managed by Patti Willard, 717-872-7561, who will reach out to our “callers” who will then call our Prayer Warriors to stop and pray. If you are available to pray for these urgent concerns & would like to be added to our prayer chain, please contact Patti. If you need to activate our Prayer Chain, please contact Patti or the church office. Indicate the urgent/emergency need when calling.

LOBBY GREETERS

1st Sunday of the Month
Bob & Cindy Hean

2nd Sunday of the Month
Carole Horn

3rd Sunday of the Month
Linda Henning

4th Sunday of the Month
Bonnie & Barry Miller

5th Sunday of the Month
Janice McElroy

We Worship Together

Sunday Worship

In-person worship will be held each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. The service will also be livestreamed on Facebook for those who wish to worship at home.

Additional Online Opportunities During the Week

- Wednesday at 10 a.m. join our prayer group in the church library.

...continued from first page

The sights, the sounds, the meals — it was my grandmother's neighborhood in rural Puerto Rico. The anxiety I had carried about this trip simply dissolved. I felt at home immediately. God had been preparing this place for me long before I boarded the plane. Preventent grace — God going ahead of us — was already in Morogoro, waiting.

More than 150 adults and 60 children moved through our week together — pastors, families, staff, little ones who hadn't yet learned to be reserved with strangers. What struck me was this: they didn't just want to know our names. They wanted to know our lives. Where are you from? What is your family like? Tell me about your church. In a community with far less material wealth than ours, they gave freely their full attention and genuine welcome. I came to serve, but I was the one enriched by the experience.



The ordination service is the moment that will stay with me longest. Bishop Muyombo invited our team to join his pastors in serving communion to the entire gathered conference — a gesture that said, “you belong at this table too.” Then he asked us to help the newly ordained put on their

robes. In that simple act — straightening a collar, smoothing a shoulder — we were drawn into something ancient and holy. We were not observers. We were participants. One body, across two continents, ordaining its pastors together.

I return home in a few days carrying more than I brought. Tanzania gave me a gift. I watched people with less give more — more attention, more welcome, more joy — and I thought about us. About the people who walk past our doors each week wondering whether anyone inside would want to know their name. We already do this work. The food box, the community table, the open door — these are our robes, our communion cups, our acts of welcome. Tanzania reminded me that hospitality is not a program. It is how the body recognizes itself.

Here's to Good Health!

Summer Safety Checklist

Just some reminders on how to stay safe and healthy in the next few months. Get out and enjoy God's creation, but take care of yourself and your family as you are out and about in the summer heat.

Sun Safety

- Wear sunscreen
- Wear a hat and sunglasses
- Stay in the shade if you get too hot
- Drink plenty of water

Insect Safety

- Use bug spray
- Wear clothes that cover arms and legs
- Shower and check your body for ticks

Water Safety

- Swim with a buddy
- Try not to swallow water
- Only dive off pool diving board
- Swim where protected by a lifeguard
- Don't back into waves

Food Safety

- Wash hands before and after eating
- Eat lots of fruits and veggies
- Keep cold food cold and hot food hot

Grilling Safety

- Always grill outside in a well-ventilated area
- Keep grill stable to avoid tipping
- Use long handled utensils
- Wear safe clothing, no loose hanging shirt tails
- Be ready to extinguish flames, use baking soda to control a grease fire
- Never move a hot grill

Driving Safety

- Always buckle up
- Don't drive distracted
- Don't drink and drive
- Never leave children or pets in a hot car
- Carry a first aid kit

Have a happy, fun, and safe summer!

Cindy Smith
Wellness Coach

Sidelights

COVENANT MEMBERS IN BUSINESS

Aunt Sandy's Attic

Sandy Leonard—Antiques, Collectibles, Books, Art, etc.
545 W. Market Street, Marietta, PA 17547, 717-426-5091

Dale Building Designs

www.DonDaleDesigns.com

Groff Family Funeral & Cremation Services, Inc.

Thomas S. Buter, 394.5300
528 W. Orange St.

Willard Hypnosis Center

Roger J. Willard
3304 Main Street, Conestoga PA 17516, 717.872.7561 or willardhypnosis.com

Pastor Derrick Becomes Provisional Elder

Congratulations to the Rev, Derrick Gutierrez, who was commissioned as a provisional member preparing for ordained ministry as an elder by Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi at the EPA Annual Conference on Tuesday, May 19.

Not only has Pastor Derrick been serving faithfully as senior pastor of Covenant UM Church, he has also been diligently fulfilling requirements toward becoming an elder. We gratefully welcome Pastor Derrick to his fourth year as pastor of Covenant Church beginning on July 1, 2026.

SEE PICTURE ON NEXT PAGE...

DON'T FORGET TO STOP AT THE FRONT DESK AND PICK UP YOUR SUMMARY OF THE RECENT 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE, or read it at the end of this newsletter (pg. 11-13)

Sidelights

THE WOW FELLOWSHIP

The women and men's group that has been meeting once a month after church for lunch and Bible study is now called The WOW Fellowship, which means **W**orship God, **O**bey His Word, and **W**itness to others. The group will be meeting the second Sunday of every month in Bethany Hall following the Worship Service. Lunch is provided.

GROCERY CARDS

Giant (\$25 and \$50) and Stauffer (\$50) grocery cards are available for purchase. Five percent of the proceeds goes to support the Mission Outreach of Covenant Church.

Please make out checks to Covenant UMC, and put "grocery cards" on the memo line. You can also see Carole Horn on Sunday mornings, or contact the church office (717-393-1561) Monday-Friday mornings if you want to make a purchase.

A/V HELP NEEDED

There is room for you on the sanctuary sound board. Interested? Training will be provided. Please see Darwin Tyson for more information.



Legacy Giving Part 3

Faithful giving need not be burdensome. In fact, for some of us, giving to the church can be a wise tax strategy — and I want to make sure you know about it. Proverbs 3:9 invites us to "honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops." (NIV) That call to generosity has always been part of our life together as God's people, and the good news is that there are ways to answer it that are both meaningful and financially sound. If you are 73 or older and have a traditional IRA, what I'm about to share could make a real difference in how you give.

If you have a traditional IRA, the IRS requires you to withdraw a minimum amount from it each year. These are called Required Minimum Distributions, or RMDs. Most people take that withdrawal, pay income tax on it, and move on. But there's another option — one that's both generous and wise.

A Qualified Charitable Distribution, or QCD, allows you to direct your RMD — up to \$105,000 per year — directly to a qualified nonprofit like Covenant UMC. When you do, that amount is excluded from your taxable income entirely. You satisfy your required withdrawal, support the ministry we share together, and reduce your tax burden at the same time.

We are grateful for every expression of generosity that sustains this congregation's ministry and mission. If this is something you'd like to explore, please speak with your financial advisor or tax professional to determine whether a QCD makes sense for your situation. Your faithfulness — in every form it takes — makes this ministry possible.



See prior page for article about Pastor Derrick.

Update from the Lead Team

May 2026

In 2026, Covenant continues to utilize a new leadership model, the Lead Team. This model comprises church members representing various ministries and committees. The Lead Team itself serves as the Trustees, Finance Committee, and SPRC Committee. We combined all the administrative committees into a single committee to minimize meetings and support our ministry focus.

The committee meets every two months, beginning in January on the 3rd Tuesday at 6 PM. Here is an update from the May 14, 2026 meeting (rescheduled due to Annual Conference):

- The Lead Team set a date for our Vision and Mission Statement meeting: Tuesday, June 23rd, from 9 AM to 12 PM. This meeting is the next step after the April 19th congregational meeting.
- The Outreach and Nurture Teams are preparing our summer events. Volunteers are welcome. See the calendar for dates for Spring Fest, VBS, and Parking Lot Sale.
- Pastor Derrick and Denise Troop met with a Lancaster city official to discuss the steps necessary to have the kitchen licensed for community meals. We are hoping to host a Thanksgiving meal this fall.
- The Childcare Center raised \$1,300 from the eggroll fundraiser.
- We are closely monitoring the status of the Organ Fund. Updates will be communicated to the congregation. We are grateful for the generosity of those who love Covenant's ministry and our historic Casavant Organ.
- Pastor Derrick will be traveling to Tanzania to offer leadership classes to church leaders there. The Outreach Team has purchased small gifts for the children he will meet.
- The Lead Team has decided to partner with another church to conduct a mutual financial review in lieu of a costly professional audit, as required by the conference. We are still considering.
- Trustees: We are developing a comprehensive maintenance plan for the church to track current issues and preventative maintenance. If you are able to help with maintenance needs, please let the Trustees know.

The next Lead Team meeting is scheduled for July 21st.

Two Open Music Positions

Covenant Church continues to search for a Pianist/Accompanist and now is also looking for a new Bell Choir Director. Please spread the word about the open positions to musicians you know and share any recommendations you may have with the church office.

Sidelights

HOSPITAL VISITATION

Don't forget to notify the church office when you or a loved one is in the hospital. Our Care Team is available to visit and share prayer.

IN MEMORY...

In memory of **Ron Kimmich**, gifts to the Organ Fund have been received from:

Lois Q. Neidermyer
Bob & Cindy Hean
James & Carol Spicher
Lynn Arnold
Deborah Bealler
Donald A. & Cindy Dale
Jennifer Engle
Derrick Gutierrez
Janice McElroy
Karl Moyer
Greg & Kathy Smith
Carol J. Zeszotarski
Grace Anne Fisher
Nancy Grau
Carole D. Horn
Heather, Caroline, & Olivia
Kinderthain
Nadine Leaman
Sandra Leonard
Esther Mefferd
Sally Wisner Ott & Bruce Ott
Cynthia L. Smith
Denise A. Troop
Larry Whiteside
Thomas S. Buter
Nancy K. & Merle Groff
Kathryn Seaber

Casavant Pipe Organ Campaign

In preparation for the 100th celebration of our unique historical Casavant Organ, Brunner & Associates has already started much needed repairs. Our campaign started late in 2025 to raise these funds. We want to thank those who have donated to date and encourage you to watch our progress on the posters displayed on our bulletin boards.

October will be here before we know it, and we are excited to give you an update on the funds received and other opportunities to meet our goal. Currently individual gifts, in memory gifts, and in honor gifts total \$37,968.38. We have completed a Grant Application with the Hampson Albert Sisler Foundation for \$25,000. Please keep this grant application in your prayers as we wait to hear if our grant will be accepted. The foundation will make that determination in June.

Last year our investment accounts did very well, and we will be able to access between \$45,000 and \$50,000 of those funds toward our goal. We thank God for the gift of our church building and our organ and more importantly the people of Covenant who make our future possible.



Casavant Organ Fund

\$100,000 GOAL

Please consider a contribution toward needed repairs on this historic organ to honor its 100th anniversary in 2026.

Make checks payable to Covenant UM Church with "Casavant Organ Fund" on the memo line.

Contribute online: <https://www.alexio.org/giving/covlanc>

Thank you for any size donation!
(Donations are tax deductible.)



100th Anniversary of the Casavant Pipe Organ

at Covenant United Methodist Church

301 W. Orange St., Lancaster, PA 17603 (parking lot at church)



Come CELEBRATE on Sunday, October 25, 2026!

Recital and Hymn Sing at 3:00 P.M.

with Acclaimed Concert Organist Gordon Turk

Resident Organist at Ocean Grove Great Auditorium, NJ

Free will offering

Reception to follow at 4:45 P.M.

Informal exploration of the Casavant organ with
Gordon Turk at 5:30 P.M. (\$25 with reservation)

SAVE THE DATE!

June 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31	1 7p Narcotics Anonymou	2 1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study	3 10a Prayer Group	4 6p Chocolate Chip Cooki	5 12p Care and Share Lun	6
7 Holy Communion 8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	8 6p VBS 7p Narcotics Anonymou	9 1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study	10 10a Prayer Group	11 9:30a Food Box Distribu	12	13
14 8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE 12p WOW luncheon and	15 7p Narcotics Anonymou	16 1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study	17 10a Prayer Group	18	19 9a IMPACT! Missions Woi	20
21 8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	22 7p Narcotics Anonymou	23 9a Mission & Vision Mee 6:30p Bible Study	24 10a Prayer Group	25	26	27
28 8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	29 7p Narcotics Anonymou	30 1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study	1 10a Prayer Group	2	3	4

July 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
			10a Prayer Group		6p Chocolate Chip Cooki	
5	6	7	10a Prayer Group	9	10	11
Holy Communion 8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	8a Community Table 7p Narcotics Anonymou	1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study				9:30a Food Box Distribu
12	13	14	10a Prayer Group	16	17	18
8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	7p Narcotics Anonymou	1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study				9a IMPACT! Missions Woi
19	20	21	10a Prayer Group	23	24	25
8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE	7p Narcotics Anonymou	1p Staff Meeting 6p Lead Team Meeting 6:30p Bible Study				
26	27	28	10a Prayer Group	30	31	1
8a Bilingual Worship Ser 9a Adult, Children & You 10:30a Worship & FaceE		1p Staff Meeting 6:30p Bible Study				8:30a Care and Share B 12p Care and Share Lun

Robin Ingram Honored on Music Appreciation Sunday

Robin Ingram was honored on Music Appreciation Sunday, May 17, as she directed the Bell Choir for the last time at Covenant Church. She was presented with a framed Certificate of Appreciation and a Celtic cross dinner bell from Malmark Bells, the maker of our set of handbells. Robin and her husband Herb are planning to move to Raleigh, North Carolina, to be close to both of their sons and their first grandchild.



(Picture shown is from November, 2025, and shows Lori Brown (far left) who is now making music in heaven.)

Robin was thanked for her faithful and dedicated service as Bell Choir Director since 2018 and also for her willingness to share her musical talents in a variety of ways with Covenant Church over the years. She has very capably substituted as director of the Chancel Choir and Covenant Chorus and has served as pianist whether to provide special music or to accompany the choir or congregational singing in worship. Robin originally became a member of Covenant's music staff when she directed the Crusader Youth Choir many years ago and then later returned to direct the Spirit Singers. She will be greatly missed not only for her excellent musical talents and willingness to always be of service but also for her graciousness and dedication to serving the Lord through music ministry.

Covenant UMC Presents

2026 CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE CONCERT SERIES

FIRST FRIDAY AT 6:00 PM

Free Church Parking Lot on 300 block of West Orange St.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Friday May 1 | Laus Deo Chorale Concert – Teen and young adult voice and instruments.
Guest soloist TBA |
| Friday June 5 | Vocal Harmonix - A premier women's a cappella show chorus providing entertaining and uplifting music |
| Friday July 3 | Benjamin Wesley and Friends -Evening of music with piano, brass and voice. |
| Friday August 7 | Ukulele Uprising - Lancaster's first and premier ukulele club. A "gang" of fun-loving musicians strumming into your hearts. |
| Friday Sept. 4 | Sound of Roses Big Band - From Dorsey to Disco, local musicians thrill with jazz, disco, rock, and swing music. |
| Friday October 2 | Music For Everyone Community Chorus |
| Friday Nov. 6 | Midst The Noise – Acoustic Band playing hits from the 70s and more. |
| Friday Dec. 4 | TBD |

Local artists will display artwork before and after the concerts.

COVENANT

United Methodist Church

110 North Mulberry Street

Lancaster, PA 17603-3507

Office Telephone: 717.393.1561

Senior Pastor's Phone: 717.682.2374

Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Church Staff

The Reverend Derrick Gutierrez, Senior Pastor

The Reverend Sally Ott, Visitation & Witness

Jeffrey McGary, Echoes Editor

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Covenant United Methodist Church
110 N. Mulberry St.
Lancaster, PA 17603-3507
Return Service Requested

2026 EPA Annual Conference Summary

The 2026 Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference with the theme of Prayer convened from May 19 through 21 at the Wildwood Convention Center in New Jersey under the leadership of Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi. Senior Pastor Derrick Gutierrez, Visitation and Outreach Pastor Sally Ott, Lay Member Lois Neidermyer, and Certified Lay Minister Fran Keller attended from Covenant UM Church.

Celebration of Ministry

After separate clergy and laity sessions during the afternoon on Tuesday, May 19, a Celebration of Ministry service officially opened the Annual Conference with worship, a child's baptism, and recognition of retirees from active ministry. The attendees were blessed with a moving liturgical dance by Aiza Preston and Ana Santiago of New Creation UMC. Then two women were commissioned toward the work of a Deacon, and six individuals were commissioned toward the work of an Elder, including our Pastor Derrick. Three pastors were celebrated and ordained to the Order of Elders in full connection.

Theme of Prayer

In her message, Bishop Moore-Koikoi called those gathered to seek, call on, and glorify God, who promises to always be near to us. She urged the church to partner with God and each other to rebuild "a new Jerusalem that is representative of God's kingdom right here on earth."

Both Wednesday and Thursday sessions began with Bible study led by Bishop Moore-Koikoi on Isaiah 55: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters...Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near...You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace." The bishop invited us to wait, repent, and listen for God so we can be open to ongoing revelation, correction, and instruction from Him.

After Bible study, those gathered learned about prayer practices from different traditions. On Wednesday, Rev. Kyewoon Choi taught about Korean prayer practices including dawn prayer meetings, all night prayer and tongsung kido – praying aloud, fasting, and desperate and persistent prayers. Rev. Dr. Sukja Bang taught about "han" – the Korean word for accumulated sorrow in a long-suffering people. She spoke especially of Korean women filling prayer rooms and doing the church's hands-on work in an era when they had very little voice and choice.

On Thursday, Rev. Towanda Connelly and Rev. Robert Johnson explained prayer in the African American tradition. They taught powerfully of African American prayer as justice, liberation, assurance, transformation, and transcendence. Such prayers occur not only in words but also invade music, movement, preaching and worship.

We've come this far by faith

In her State of the Church address, Bishop Moore-Koikoi highlighted Eastern Pennsylvania's deep rootedness in tradition, reflecting that "We've come this far by faith." These traditions serve as a foundation and springboard for where God wants us to go.

Bishop Moore-Koikoi called on the Annual Conference to continue building leadership among young people by recognizing "our young people are not the future; they are the now." She highlighted the way Camp & Retreat Ministry is already doing that with record numbers at this year's confirmation retreats.

The bishop also explained the Annual Conference's need to shift from a culture of staff-driven mission and ministry to one of local church-driven mission and ministry. Key to this shift will be a requirement, over the next year, for every local church to develop a comprehensive plan for forming disciples. The Annual Conference will walk alongside churches in

Over the last year, the Connectional Table has been working to discern a vision for the Annual Conference. It has identified four top priorities: strengthening the local church, justice/prophetic witness, leadership/discipleship, and youth and young adult ministry.

Stewarding the conference office property

Bishop Moore-Koikoi also shared that the Annual Conference office will soon undergo needed renovations following 2023 legislation that approved \$750 000 from apportioned funds to do that work. Upon review, it became clear those funds would not be sufficient to cover the costs of the renovations needed, yet renovating is still the most economical way forward. The Conference Trustees will draw \$3 million from trustee funds to make up the difference.

The work will begin this summer and is anticipated to take 12-18 months. Bishop Moore-Koikoi, along with VK Macwana (Trustees Chair) and Henry Moore (Property Manager) will provide a time for Annual Conference members to ask questions upon Bishop's return from Tanzania in June.

Wesleyan Vile-tality

At the end of Bishop Moore-Koikoi's State of the Church address, she called us back to our Methodist roots of "vile" ministry – following John Wesley's example of ministry that would be considered undignified by others, like preaching in fields and prisons. She presented the John Wesley Vile Ministry Award to Rev. Bill Ritzenthaler whose own life was transformed by boundary-breaking grace and who now extends that grace to others through ministries of evangelism, discipleship, and community outreach.

Seated at Christ's table

In the Service of Remembrance, the Annual Conference gave thanks for the lives of those faithful who have passed since we met last. Retiring elder, Rev. Robin Hynicka, painted a picture of those beloved now seated at a table set by Jesus. Through their lives, they also set tables "in sanctuaries, at soup kitchens, in living rooms and hospital rooms... where people could come hungry and leave knowing they belong." Hynicka called us to honor them by continuing the feast they helped to prepare. We anticipated our reunion with them at the Lord's table through the celebration of Holy Communion.

Legislation

In the legislative session, the Annual Conference affirmed several resolutions surrounding economic justice including, Ensuring Just Wages and Benefits in United Methodist Congregations, Transparency and Access to Benefits for Lay Employees and Deacons, and Exploring Pension and Health Benefits Coverage for Deacons, Deaconesses, and Home Missioners.

Members also engaged in meaningful discussion about the impact and basis of sexual education in congregational life, ultimately affirming the Resolution on the Use of Comprehensive Sex Education Resources in Congregational Life.

EPA also passed the following resolutions:

#2026-01: Updates and Changes to the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference Rules of Order

#2026-02: Denouncing Dehumanizing Immigration Enforcement and Calling the Church to Faithful Witness

#2026-03: Supporting the Shelter First Act

*#2026-05: Church Closures: Somerton UMC, Minersville First UMC,
Lighthouse Korean UMC, and Kemblesville UMC*

*#2026-10: Nominations and Leadership Report (34 pages of clergy and laity
in leadership positions and on conference/district committees)*

#2026-11: Equitable Compensation

#2026-12: Rental Housing Allowances

#2026-13: Ministerial Pension Rate for Pre-82

#2026-14: Advance Special Applications

Conference Council on Finance and Administration

Rev. Steve Cherry, CFA Chairperson introduced Danielle Andrews, the EPA's new CFO and treasurer, who presented the 2027 budget. While this year's budget is largely the same as last year's, Andrews said that 2026 and 2027 would be pivotal years to "reset our financial structure and foundation."

Nevertheless, "the one thing I want you to take away from the budget that's before you is that this Annual Conference is okay. The budget is balanced. All needs will be met," said Andrews. That said, significant work is required to ensure the conference's long-term financial stability.

When asked about audits, Andrews shared that it would not be possible to provide full audits due to the nature of the records that were kept but that an outside agency would do a full cash reconciliation and a five-year compilation of financial statements. Information will be shared once that work is complete. The 2027 budget legislation was affirmed.

Looking to the future

On Thursday morning, Bishop Moore-Koikoi reminded the Annual Conference of the upcoming Leadership Gathering spearheaded by the Council of Bishops to dream about the future of the United Methodist Church. Linda Mier and Rev. Young Hak Lee, lay person and clergy respectively serving in EPA, will be among the leaders who gather in Calgary, Canada, in October of this year.

Mier shared that while a denomination-wide survey revealed youth and young adult engagement to be the church's highest priority, the number of young respondents was extremely low.

"We cannot simply ask young people to return to a church that we desire. We can't rebuke them or become defensive when they tell us their spiritual needs aren't being met," said Mier. "We need to shift away from viewing young people simply as a demographic metric that we need to save our institution and instead ask what kind of church are we actually inviting them into."

Mier invited the Annual Conference to send ideas about what the denomination should become and what it should leave behind to her via email at miermumc@gmail.com.

Closing Worship

Annual Conference 2026 drew to a close with a time of song, scripture and, of course, prayer. After filling up on the good, rich food that God offered in our time together, Bishop Moore-Koikoi sent the United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania home with a blessing: "Go, seeking the God who will always be found. Go out in joy and be led in peace."

Submitted by Lois Neidermyer and adapted from "EPA Annual Conference Wrap Up," 5/22/26