

Dear First United Methodist Church of Gilbert Family,

Due to Covid-19, this year's Annual Conference for the Desert Southwest was held virtually. Because of this format, it was a truncated event with less content and more focus on the specific business of the conference. Here is our summary of the highlights involved:

- The budget of the Annual Conference has been cut for 2021 due to the anticipated decrease in overall apportionments. The rationale behind the decrease is based on both the pandemic as well as the ongoing strain related to General Conference 2019. The pandemic has impacted local churches who are reporting significant decreases in giving. In addition, local churches have experienced unexpected costs related to health and safety measures and acquiring new technologies for worship. All of these factors combined have led the conference to anticipate ongoing downtrends related to apportionment giving and as a result significantly reduced budgets in many areas. More information on specific budgets can be found on the Desert Southwest Annual Conference website.
- The conference has approved new health insurance effective January 1, 2021. These changes will reduce costs paid by local churches toward clergy benefits. More information can be found on the Desert Southwest Annual Conference website.
- The conference has approved new liability insurance effective January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2024. This policy change was partly due to the a locked in rate for the three-year period. More information can be found on the Desert Southwest Annual Conference website.
- General Conference for The United Methodist Church as a whole was scheduled for May 2020. However, due to the pandemic this was postponed. The new dates are August 29 – September 7, 2021. It will still be held in Minneapolis. More information and updates as

they are made available can be found on the Desert Southwest Annual Conference website.

- The Council of Bishops postponed the 2020 Jurisdictional Conferences due to the pandemic. The Western Jurisdictional Conference will now be held November 10-12, 2021 and is to be hosted by the Mountain Sky Annual Conference. Previously scheduled Episcopal elections for new Bishops will occur at that time.
- Bishop Robert Hoshibata, resident Bishop of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference, was scheduled to retire following the installment of a new Bishop later this year. However, due to the postponement of the Jurisdictional Conference and election of new Episcopal leader, he has graciously agreed to postpone his retirement. Bishop Bob will continue serving as our resident Bishop through the next Jurisdictional Conference and subsequent installment of a new Episcopal leader.
- In Bishop Bob's opening address, he appealed to the members of our Annual Conference to participate in a virtual protest against racism. Furthermore, from his address the conference was invited to work towards eradicating all forms of racism. As a such, a new coalition has been formed to teach, train, and lead our conference in this endeavor. This coalition is a combination of the efforts the Commission on Religion & Race (CORR) as well as the Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee (ELCC). The RACE Coalition, an abbreviation for Reflection, Action, Courageous Dialogue, and Engagement, is actively working to promote racially-focused education and dialogue, as well as eliminate all forms of racism within our annual conference. More information can be found on their website, [dsc-race.com](http://dsc-race.com).

It was our pleasure to represent you during this year's first virtual annual conference. It presented new and exciting ways to continue to be in connection with the other churches in our Annual Conference. As laity representatives, we also participated in a training about our vocation as Christians. We learned about how we are all part of the priesthood of believers and each have a place of ministry to do the work of the kingdom. If you are wondering how you can serve your local church or how you can use your gifts for the work of the kingdom, you can access the training on the Desert Southwest Annual Conference website. If you have any questions or want more information about our experiences at this year's annual conference, please contact the church office and we would be glad to talk with you personally.

You Sisters and Brother in Christ,

Sharon Kotsonas, Sylvia Harris, & Ed Stressman