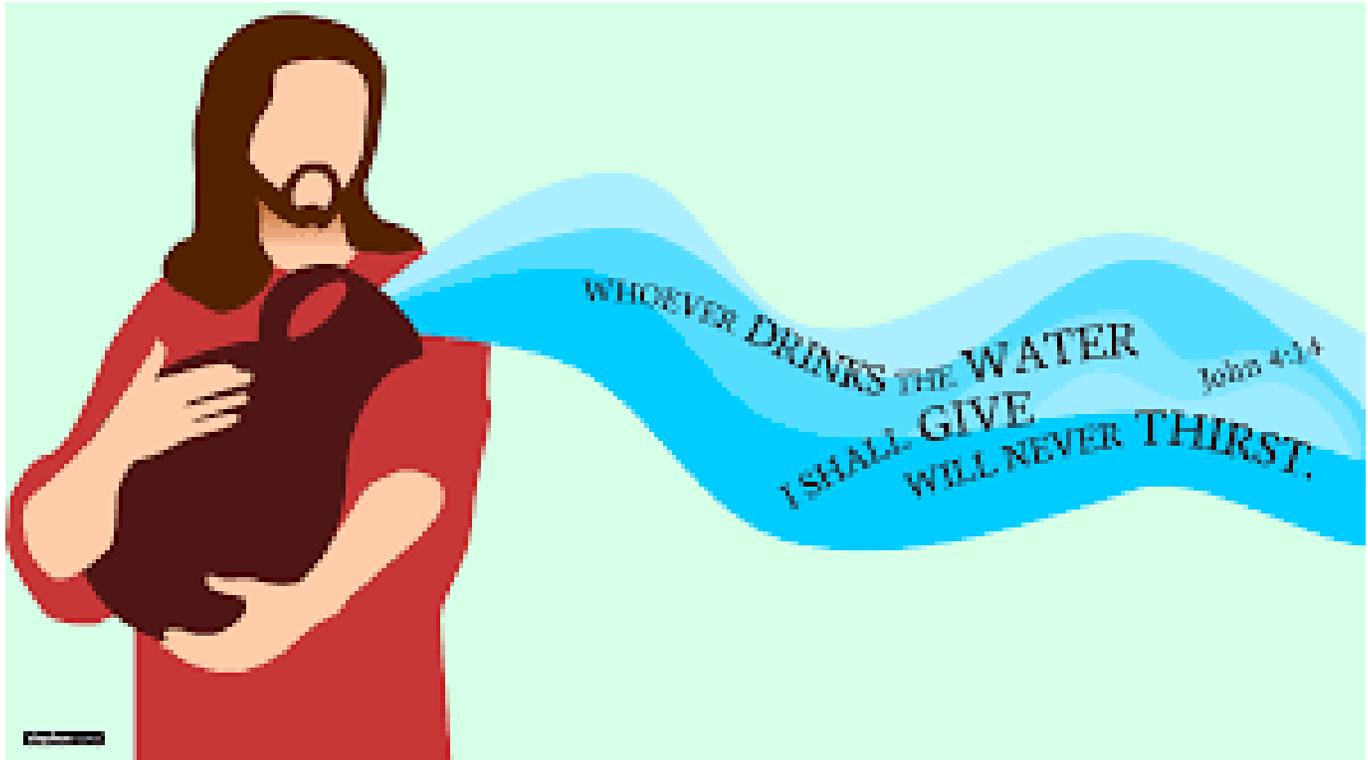




The Beacon

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FEBRUARY 2021



8 Trends Impacting Church Leadership for 2021



Doug Powe and Ann Michel of the Lewis Center identify eight notable trends in 2020's swirl of change. Some trends have been underway for some time, but accelerated significantly in the past year, for example the church's embrace of online ministry. But in other areas, the events of 2020 have led to renewed emphasis on the basics — prayer, fellowship, faith formation, and the call to racial justice.

For the past several years, at the start of the new year we have identified major trends and changes we see shaping the contours of congregational life. The year 2021 dawns at a time when the COVID-19 crisis has brought more change to our churches in a few months than most of us have witnessed in our lifetimes, and there is a growing sense that things will never return to where they once were. We remain in a very liminal period when we see only through a glass dimly. For that reason, we offer our observations this year cautiously but also hopefully, knowing that disruptive change brings great risk but also engenders creative and resilient responses.

An acceleration of underlying trends

While the events of 2020 are themselves unprecedented, many of the ensuing changes are not entirely novel. Crisis has a way of laying bare realities we may not see as clearly in "normal" times. Several trends that we have been monitoring for some time, which may have seemed far off on the horizon to the average church, are now front and center because of the coronavirus.

(continued next page)

8 Trends Impacting Church Leadership for 2021 *(continued from page 1)*

1. The importance of ministry in the digital realm

This time last year, we identified “the move to the internet” as the top trend for 2020. But we could not possibly have imagined how quickly congregations would embrace online worship, digital meeting spaces, electronic giving, and social media connections in the face of the pandemic. Many congregations report that their worship attendance and participation in meetings and groups have grown during this period as has their ability to connect with people from outside their immediate area. Some churches regard this foray into digital spaces as a temporary stopgap, and they expect to revert to their normal pattern of ministry as soon as possible. But forward-looking churches are capitalizing on this opportunity to hone their skills in digital outreach and develop a permanent online presence, not just to reach new people but to retain existing members who find they prefer the convenience of online engagement.

2. Changing staff configurations

In past years we have noted ongoing changes in the religious workforce including changes in how churches deploy their staffs. This trend gained momentum in 2020 as work-from-home orders and a pared-down schedule of events upended the day-to-day work of most church offices. The pandemic has forced some churches to downsize their staffs for financial reasons. And it has put a premium on a set of electronic communications skills increasingly vital to virtually every aspect of the practice of ministry. Some congregations are starting to think about hybrid or digital ministry positions. This may mean hiring someone who has technical knowledge but must be helped toward a better theological grounding.

3. The impact of church size

Large membership churches have long had an outsized influence on church life in America. However, many small congregations are quite stable and healthy, particularly if not overburdened by building expenses or compensation costs. We see this same pattern in the response to the pandemic. Larger, well-resourced congregations were far better positioned to transition to online ministry in the early days of the pandemic, and their technology and staffing advantages may make them even more dominant as online ministry takes root. But the pandemic also revealed the unique strength of many smaller churches who have sustained connections more easily during the shutdown due to their strong relational networks.

4. The waning role of denominations

The events of 2020 have also accelerated a decline in the influence and role of denominations that has been ongoing for several decades. In the face of continued membership declines and the financial impact of the pandemic, many mainline churches are struggling to support programs and administrative structures at the denominational level. There have already been layoffs, and more layoffs are likely in the future. Fewer and fewer individuals in the community are drawn to the denominational label of a church. Instead, they focus on the impact of the local congregation regardless of its affiliation. Going forward, we expect a continued diminution in the role denominations play in shaping the religious landscape.

Back to basics

Another theme we see in how churches have ministered in the face of the pandemic is a return to the basics. While born of necessity, this back-to-basics approach may be conducive to revitalizing faith formation at a time when older models, such as Sunday school, are losing currency.

5. Reevaluation of programmatic offerings

With many routine events and activities on hold, many churches are reassessing their programs and asking what needs to continue, what should be discontinued, and what needs to be done differently. Whether by design or default, most churches are in a shakedown period and will likely emerge with a slimmer ministry footprint that is more reliant on hybrid offerings that combine in-person and online engagement.

6. Renewed emphasis on prayer, pastoral care, and interpersonal connections

Shutdowns and stay-at-home orders have highlighted the importance of relational bonds within faith communities. With so many other activities on pause, many church members have rediscovered the foundational value of group fellowship and prayer, even if it happens via telephone or Zoom. For pastors and other leaders, it has required a far more creative and intentional approach to basic pastoral care.

7. Rediscovering home faith practices

In 2020, our homes became our sanctuaries, and parents took on the role of Sunday school teachers. This renewed attention to how we practice faith at home has revealed that many of us, particularly in mainline Protestant traditions, are a bit “out of practice” in this regard. For congregations seeking more effective approaches to faith development, particularly for children and youth, 2020 may have revealed one of the missing puzzle pieces — the need to equip people for meaningful personal devotions and help them foster faith within their homes and families.

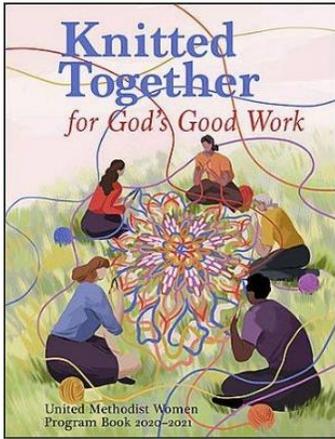
8. Reclaiming leadership on racial justice

The experiences of 2020 also brought renewed attention to questions of racial justice, particularly following the death of George Floyd. Some churches have taken the opportunity to reexamine racial equity through the new lenses of anti-racism and Black Lives Matter. However, the church for the most part continues to be divided racially even as the nation grows closer with each successive generation to a time when the nonwhite population is no longer a minority. The church has an opportunity to provide prophetic, relevant leadership on what is perhaps the most pressing public issue of our day. Will we claim this calling? Or forfeit the opportunity to provide much-needed moral leadership?

Expect even more change

Within our churches, as in our communities, there is a palpable longing for a return to normalcy. But it is unlikely that 2020’s rollercoaster ride will come full circle and let us off where we got on. Our eyes have been opened to new possibilities, new patterns of relationship, and new ways of being together. Many of these changes are hopeful. But looking to the experience of other sectors that have migrated online (news and journalism, for example), new patterns of engagement and new approaches to economic sustainability are likely to emerge as the church ventures further into the digital sphere. The most important trendline we see as we look toward 2021 and beyond is that change is likely to beget even more change.





UMW MEETS FEB. 9

The United Methodist Women - Empire unit will gather in Fellowship Hall (with masks, social distancing) for their February meeting at **11:00 AM**. The program will be "Knitted Together Against Violence," specifically violence against women and girls. If you knit, crochet, or sew, bring a 5" X 5" square that you have made and prayed over for women and girls who experience violence. Any color or pattern, your choice.

Recently, President Jean Petersen personally presented *Honor Pins for "Gifts in Mission"* to **Jan Lyon** (for 2019) and **Eric Foged** (for 2020). Let's thank Jan and Eric for all that they do for the ministries of the church.

Empire United Methodist Church - Vision Statement:

A community who goes out, serving in love, sharing Christ.

"Go, Serve. Share Christ."



BIBLE STUDY THURSDAYS

2:30 pm

Stay
in the
Word



(via iPad, Cell Phone, Laptop, desktop & computer)

We are studying of the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Contact Tom Petersen if you would like to participate in the weekly ZOOM Bible Study Class.



FEBRUARY

BENZIE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: Unpaid Lunch Debt Program

Your donation helps to pay off student school lunch debt in Benzie County. The fund affects about 1,000 kids who attend Benzie Central High School, Middle School, and Lake Ann Elementary.

Make your donation by check payable to: Empire United Methodist Church [PO Box 261, Empire 49630] with note: Benzie Central School District Unpaid Lunch Debt Program. Thank you for your consideration.

The United Methodist Church's special giving structure ensures your generosity blesses as many people as possible in sustainable, strategic ways. Through your support, and our church, we fund many projects each year.

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

FEB. 1, 2021 – 6:30 PM

(Minutes will be sent out in a separate email as soon as possible.)

On the Agenda:

Recommendation to Board: purchase of Laptop for church office administrator

MI Conference \$300 Grant - apply for ministry funds, need a volunteer to write grant

UMC General Conference Aug 29-Sept 7 - preparing congregation for decisions to make

Preparing for in-person worship

OTHER BUSINESS



God's Conversation Hearts

Be Mine - John 3:16

Be Good - John 14:15

Love Me - Luke 10:27

True Love - Jeremiah 31:3

All Mine - John 10:27-30

I'm Sure - John 14:1-3 **Sweet Talk** - Psalm 119:103

FEBRUARY 17



Canticle of Covenant Faithfulness

United Methodist Hymnal #125

Seek the Lord who now is present, call upon the Lord, who is near, let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return, the Lord may have mercy on them; that our God may abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts your thoughts.

Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I intend, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me. (Isaiah 55:6-11 adaptation)



A PRAYER FOR LENT

Father God, help us never forget that Jesus knew his time was coming. The rest of us pass blissfully through life knowing we will die "someday." Jesus knew the time was near, yet he continued to show love and faith. He continually put himself on the line when most of us would have run away in fear. God, during this time of Lent, give us just one small taste of what it must have been like for him. Help us appreciate the great love your Son had for us -- a love that kept him living for others, even when he knew he was going to die. Amen.

**Serving as the Hands & Feet of Christ
137 Years in Empire
1884 - 2021**

The Beacon is published monthly by The EMPIRE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. Our mailing address is: PO Box 261 - 10050 Michigan Street, Empire, MI 49630. We can be reached at 231.326.5510 or www.empireumc@centurytel.net. Information and items for publication must be received at the church office by the 3rd Wednesday of the month.



EUMC Mission Statement

"To live out a faith in Jesus Christ through our efforts to hear others, share in God's truths, join in worship, and celebrate in the Joy of God's grace."

SUNDAYS

10:00 AM **Worship Service**
8:00 PM AA Group

MONDAYS

9:00-1:00 **Church Office open**
10:00 AM Worship Team

WEDNESDAYS

9:00-1:00 **Church Office open**
8:00 PM NA Group

THURSDAYS

9:00-1:00 **Church Office open**
10:00 AM Worship Team

**THE CHURCH BUILDING IS CLOSED
UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
CHECK YOUR EMAILS - FACEBOOK - WEBSITE
FOR CURRENT INFORMATION**



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