

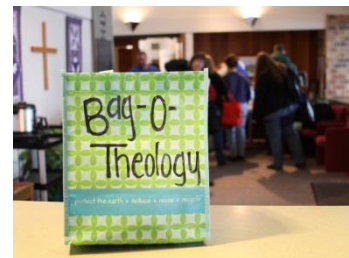


WISCONSIN
CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Happy Birth Year to You, Lay Academy!

By Rev. Deborah Payden

A long time ago, in a galaxy not so far away, a well-known Christian educator said: “We don’t spend enough time on intentional adult Christian education. If we did, we could spend less worrying about children and youth because adults couldn’t help themselves but share the faith.” Mind you this didn’t mean we should abandon children and youth faith formation ministries by any means! But I have come to understand this observation and found truth in its application in the life of the church.



**Lay Academy
Mascot**

Twenty years ago, while Dan Jansen and Bonnie Blair were winning Gold medals at the Olympics, Conference Christian education leaders discerned a need for an adult faith formation ministry in the Conference. The vision was to provide a ministry gathering adults from all over the Conference, utilize expert instructors to shape this ministry with depth and integrity of scholarship, and to be challenging for the participants. Seeds were planted, calls went out and the first gatherings of a new holy learning community were begun.

Leadership changed hands from the initial vision and shaping by Rev. Bonnie Van Overbeke, to the transitional carrying of Rev. Joan Sulser, to Rev. Gail O’Neal who shepherded Lay Academy for 16 years. The ministry has grown in scope, and as a respected adult faith formation model outside of the Conference. Instructors are drawn from seminaries and colleges, national and Conference staff and local church clergy. All are willing to take time from regular ministries to share their expertise and gifts of teaching. Twenty years and over 500 participants later, the Lay Academy is still a strong, vibrant and engaging ministry in our Conference.

How gifted I have been to witness participants amazement, challenges and growth in discipleship and understanding theology, Biblical knowledge, church history and practices these past three years. And the reflection papers, oh the reflection papers! How marvelous and privileged I am to read them. Their insights, passion, and questing of faith leads me to confirm we are the church that celebrates “the priesthood of all believers” and all are welcome on this journey of faith!

Fire in the Pews! Equipping God's People for the Work of Building up the Body of Christ is the theme of the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Conference June 6-8. It will be centered on the celebration of this 20th birth year of Lay Academy. Come, celebrate and worship with us! Come and hear some of our Seminary instructors share their insights about the faith today. Come and witness a ministry filled with passion and joy!

Registration for the 2014-15 year of [Lay Academy](#) is open! Come and be a part of the 20th year of this holy learning community. Encourage others to do so. In this time of transformation or "recombobulation" of the church, Lay Academy continues to be relevant while retaining its core integrity and vision. It is still empowering God's people to serve in a new church in a new world!

May you have many more Lay Academy...

God's grace and peace attend you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Debbie Payden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Debbie" and last name "Payden" clearly distinguishable.

Rev. Deborah Payden
Director/Minister
Wisconsin Conference Lay Academy

Editor's note: Registration for the Annual Meeting will be available in April.