

2017 Geographic Study: Missionary Conferences of the United Methodist Church in the United States

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The 2017 Geographic Study tells the story of the three missionary conferences of The United Methodist Church: Alaska United Methodist Conference, Red Bird Missionary Conference, and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. You will learn about the history and how each conference is founded as well as how they add to the richness of the United Methodist connection in the United States. The study explores church history alongside U.S. history in these regions, our ability to both welcome and marginalize those we consider different from ourselves, and the ways in which the church comes together to welcome and support our sisters and brothers through creative and authentic ministry.

We are a church shaped by race and class that was birthed at the same time as “Manifest Destiny,” an ideology that promoted the idea that Euro Americans, and Christians in particular, were destined to dominate what we now know as the United States.

The Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Red Bird Missionary Conference, and the Alaska United Methodist Conference are a hybrid of home and international missionary work. These conferences are a product of United States empire building. While some Christians were driven by Manifest Destiny from which they rationalized grand larceny and genocide, others were inspired by the gospel to serve “the least of these” by challenging the violence of military and political domination, as well as by addressing the needs of those doing the invading and those setting up towns in the middle of great upheaval. Most of them thought of themselves as good people. It is in this context that the conferences were born.

The aim of the study is to give an overview of the three missionary conferences in The United Methodist Church, the contexts out of which they grew and their current engagements. What does the future look like for these conferences? Broad-ranging conversations are taking place around this question. The General Board of Global Ministries and the missionary conferences are exploring best operational and structural options for maximizing mission and ministry going forward in these unique locations. These dialogues, different in each case, have begun and will take place across the 2017–2020 quadrennium. The objective is mutuality in mission partnership and collaboration, which provides the heartbeat of all productive mission within the United Methodist connection.

Leaders guide by Judith Pierre-Okerson