



This year at the 234th Session of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference, we celebrated the theme: "Leading as Followers of the Way." Meeting at UMES in the Hytche Athletic Center, we remembered our Vision: Connected Christians offering the hope of Jesus Christ in today's world, and we lifted up the Leading aspect of our Mission: Cultivating Christ communities through our CALL—Connecting, Acting, **Leading**, and Loving. We gathered around the 23rd Psalm as our theme Scripture.

Opening Worship kicked off our time together this year. A combined praise team from Epworth UMC and Faith and Israel UMC's in Lewes set tone for worship with gathering music before leading us in an upbeat rendition of "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing." Rev. Russell Ewell, the Associate Pastor of The Village Church of St. Louis and Co-chair of The United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities, brought us a message from 1 Samuel 16:1-13. He reminded us that David, who became King David, was often overlooked as the eighth son, just as sometimes we overlook people with disabilities. He encouraged us to see people the way God sees us and to not forget those on the margins. After participating in the Great Thanksgiving, written by Rev. Michael Johnson, we shared communion with one another around the table.



After lunch, we divided into Clergy Executive Session and Laity Session. Both groups heard from Jalen Lawson, the Ambassador from the Black College Fund, who graduated from Bennett College. The clergy voted on ministerial matters, including ordination and commissioning and took an offering for the Howard L. Gordy, Jr. Clergy Assistance Fund. The Laity Session opened with music and prayer. Rev. Turhan Potter, Sr., pastor of New UMC, offered a teaching session on leadership. The lay representatives heard from the United Methodist Women, the United Methodist Men, and about our Conference Appeals.

Gathering back together as one body, Rev. Shane Moran led us in a Native American blessing of the grounds and we sang the historic hymn "And Are We Yet Alive." After adopting our Agenda and Organizational and Procedural Motion, we voted on Constitutional Amendment #1. Last year, when we voted on the Constitutional Amendments, the General Conference Secretary had distributed the incorrect wording of the amendment to all of the Annual Conferences. We voted via electronic ballot and submitted our results to be joined with the other Annual Conferences.

Peninsula-Delaware Conference has many celebrations! We continue to give 100% to our General Church apportionments, which support funds like Africa University, the Black College Fund, and World Service Fund. The World Service Fund connects us together as a church to offer ministry with the poor, healing ministries for Global Health, and leadership development. Our giving increased abundantly this year, increasing over \$300,000 to missions. Most of this amount supported UMCOR through Special Advances, such as hurricane relief and recovery. We have also seen an increase in participation in small groups and Sunday school, even though our average worship attendance decreased. Yet, small groups and Sunday school serve as building blocks for making disciples who make disciples, so we can celebrate even as we acknowledge that we are still going onto perfection.

We also recognized our need to continue going onto perfection as we heard the Vision Team report. The primary aspect of the report described part of our response to the North East Jurisdiction Call to Action to address racism. The Vision Team sponsored a structural racism audit, hiring an outside consulting firm to help us examine our Annual Conference structure, policies, and procedures through the lens of racial justice. We learned about the three main focus areas which resulted: financial equity, increased cross-cultural communication, and examining policies and procedures through the lens of racial justice and the impact of these processes on African American pastors and churches. Since we completed the audit in late April, our work on these focus areas has just begun. We continue to look forward to experiencing the fruit of our labor.

After a celebration of The United Methodist Church's 50 year anniversary and voting on a few resolutions, which will be covered later in the report, we had dinner and returned for a dialogue on the Way Forward. Rev. David Bennett and his team spoke against the Council of Bishops' recommendation for the "One Church Model." Rev. Vicky Starnes and her team spoke in favor of the "One Church Model." Then, the Bishop invited us to have conversation around our tables about lingering questions and comments. After the dialogue, we heard from Equitable Compensation and Conference Finance and Administration. We ended the evening with the Lay Leader's Report by Mrs. Yvonne Jackson.

Friday morning began with the beautifully poignant storytelling of Ragghi Rain Calentine. Ragghi shared stories from the heart, which prepared us to hear the Cabinet's report on the Act of Repentance Update. The Bishop and Cabinet described their own personal actions taken to increase awareness of Native American culture and struggles and policy steps to address wrongs committed against local tribes. The highlight involved the Peace Tree Ceremony at Pecometh, where the Conference and local tribes celebrated the planting of the Peace Tree at from the original Act of Repentance. Pecometh offered a camp scholarship for one child in each of our local tribes and the Cabinet and Vision Team matched that offer, so that each tribe could send two youths. Dr. Bonnie Hall, a member of Harmony UMC and past Council Tribal Member, Nanticoke Indian Tribe, offered the CONAM response to the update, challenging us to continue to involve local churches and make a real difference in the lives of Native peoples in our conference bounds.

We spent the remainder of Friday morning in teaching sessions, by Rev. Dr. Junius Dotson, from Discipleship Ministries. Rev. Dotson presented on the importance of creating an intentional discipleship process for our churches. He invited us to share around our tables how we had intentionally nurtured our own discipleship this year. Then he invited us to make sure we See All the People. He shared stories of churches building new ways to connect and see the people in their neighborhoods.

After lunch, we celebrated awards and retirements and ministry anniversaries, as well as admitting the candidates. The Conference Board of Higher Education and Ministry awarded scholarships to several of our young people. The Disabilities Committee presented an award to Principio UMC in Perryville for adding a lift to provide accessibility for people with mobility struggles. The Vision Team in conjunction with Discipleship Ministries granted four One Matters Awards, one to each District. This award celebrates churches that move from a zero in professions of faith to at least one, recognizing that each one matters to God. Pastor David Webster and the Deal Island Charge received Salisbury's award. Pastor Kevin Benjamin and Mt. Salem UMC received the award for Wilmington. Ellendale Charge and Pastor Diane Melson received the award for Dover. And, Pastor Nina Johnson-Wright and St. Matthew UMC received the award for Easton. In addition to a plaque, the churches receive a check for \$1000 for their ministries. We celebrated the retirees with a slide show of a picture, their favorite Scripture and favorite hymn. What a joy to see the diversity in gifts!

Following the admission of candidates, we heard the presentation from the Board of Pension and Health Benefits about changing the retiree health plan. Each retiree will have a Health Reimbursement Account, with \$2400 given annually by the Conference Board of Pensions. They will work through Wespath and Via Benefits to choose a plan which best fits their health situation. Additionally, we voted on the Past Service Rate for the Pre-1982 Pension and to allow up to 100% of pension or disability money to be designated as a Housing Allowance.

After voting on the Clergy Lay Leadership report, we heard from the Missions Board of the Annual Conference. This presentation included information on VIM (Volunteers in Mission) from Karin Tunnell, who celebrated the various teams serving from around the conference. Susie Keefer, the chair of the Central Congo Partnership, presented on the work of the partnership, including the feeding program, called Miriam's Table. Our missionaries, Donna and Jonathan Baker, shared a video of projects in the

Congo and invited the participants from the Congo Mission Team to share reflections. What amazing work we are accomplishing together, in the name of Jesus Christ, in the Central Congo!

Right before dinner, we had the corporate session of Wesley College. Rev. Leroy Jones presented a resolution to designate Wesley as a Conference Historical Site, recognizing our history in starting the school and supporting it over the years. President Bob Clark gave a presentation on Wesley's Worth, demonstrating the importance of a religious-based education to the on-going success of democracy. He encouraged us to get engaged with Wesley with our young people.



Friday night, the Spirit showed up as we celebrated Commissioning and Ordination. We commissioned a missionary, Rev. Elizabeth Marrero, who will be serving in California. We commissioned one deacon, Rev. Carlos Reyes, and five elders: Elizabeth Marrero, Wendy Owen, Lawrence Pelham, Christopher Pettit, and Zachary Wheeler. We also fully ordained three elders: Jacqueline Ford, Jacob Macklin, and Brett Pinder. Several people, including several young adults, responded to the Bishop's call to ministry, which always brings hope for the future.

On Saturday, we began with gathering music provided by some young adults, with Isaiah Embert on the keyboard. We heard the Monitoring Report, which this year included comments from any of the participants and gave us some great insight. We celebrated our young adults, both the CCYAM (Conference Council on Young Adult Ministries) and the Young People's Convocation, as well as CCYM (Conference Council on Youth Ministries) and the Young People's Ministry Network. Hearing



from our young people also filled us with hope for the future of our church.

We finished up by debating and voting on a resolution to urge unity in the face of schism, from the Advocacy Resource Team, presented by Rev. Tom Pasmore. An amendment of the resolution was made and ultimately passed. The Bishop set appointments and we voted for adjournment before we brought the families in for the Service of Remembrance. Rev. Tom Carter preached at that service, reminding us of the calling and the promise of the 23rd Psalm. The word and the music provided healing for those who mourned.

Resolutions which were adopted:

R-1 Organizational and Procedural Motion

R-1a Conference Rules of Order

R-2 Consent Calendar

R-3 Resolution on Wesley College

R-4 Resolution in Opposition to Capital Punishment

R-5 Resolution in Support of Humane Immigration Policy

R-6 Resolution in Opposition to Physician-Assisted Suicide

R-10 2019 Covenant Funding Plan Resolution

R-12 Rental/Housing Allowances for Retired or Disabled Ministers of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference

R-13 Setting the Pre-1982 Past Service Rate

Resolutions which were amended and adopted:

[R-8 Resolution to Set Minimum Salaries for Calendar Year 2019](#)

[R-9 Resolution to Urge Unity in the Face of Schism](#)

[R-11 Change to Retiree Medical Coverage](#)

Resolutions which were withdrawn:

R-7 Resolution to Invite Discussion and Sharing of Biblical Study Materials on LGBTQ Issues.

The 235th Session of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference will reconvene on May 30, 2019 at the Chase Center in Wilmington, Delaware.