

2017 Annual Conference

The Western North Carolina Conference, officiated by Bishop Paul L. Leeland, gathered at Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center in Lake Junaluska, N. C. from June 23-25, 2016. The theme for this conference was "Go & Baptize the World". (Matthew 28: 16-20) Guest speakers for the event included:

Bishop Leonard Fairly from the Louisville Area, Kentucky Conference, preached at the opening service. His sermon was titled, "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism," in which he talked about the power of God's grace that is given in baptism. Bishop Fairley told the Conference, "You better not fool with this water," This water, through the grace that it imparts, will change your life – not only once – but continually." The first special offering, designated for the Endowment Fund for Theological Education in the Central Conferences, was taken during the opening service. The total offering was \$16,702 dollars, and a matching gift of the same amount was promised, making the total offering \$33,404. The service concluded with a baptismal remembrance; we affirmed our faith, confessed our sin, prayed together over the water, and were then given the opportunity to come forward and touch water to remember our identity. Bishop Fairly ended with "Remember who you are. Our identity is bound up in Christ. We are all God's beloved."

Bishop Lawson Bryan from the South Georgia Conference, preached at the Commissioning Service on Thursday evening (sermon was titled, "The Great Discovery"), and at the Ordination of Deacons and Elders Worship service on Saturday evening (sermon was titled, "When the Wine Runs Out"). He emphasized the point of the miracle in Cana that we do indeed "run out," but that's when Jesus shows up. He reminded all those being ordained that they just need to "pour the water" and remember that they can't turn the water to wine; God will do that.

Rev. Donald Jenkins from St. Paul UMC in Winston Salem NC preached at the Celebration of Life service on Saturday. His sermon was titled, "Swept Away". Toward the end of his sermon, he compared the difference of a family who had been evicted from their home to his own family's move from one home to another to serve a different church, closing with "Those who have been swept away in salvation and swept away in service are not evicted when live ends; neither are they forsaken. Rather they are lovingly moved to new housing; *when this earthly tent is destroyed we have another building, eternal in the heavens.*" We celebrated the lives 19 Clergy and Diaconal Ministers and the lives of 26 spouses of Clergy who have gone before us.

Bishop Leeland preached at the Service of the Word, Table and the Fixing of Appointments (closing worship service), on Sunday, June 25th. His sermon was titled, "Run So As To Win"; music was provided by the Lake Junaluska Singers, and Holy Communion was served. The 2nd special offering, designated for the Ministerial Education Fund (MEF), was taken during the closing service. The total offering was \$15,833.31. At the close of worship, the **2017-18 clergy appointments were fixed**, and the clergy and laity of the Western North Carolina were sent forth to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Main actions of the conference

- Introduced our new Bishop, Paul L. Leeland, and his wife Janet.
- Heard reports from various groups and work areas within the conference.
- **Approved** the 2017 Consent Agenda that consisted of 16 petitions, primarily election of Board Directors or appointment of board members.
- Five 2016 General Conference Constitutional Amendments that were adopted by a 2/3 majority vote in the General Conference were presented for consideration and a vote by our Annual Conference. After lengthy discussions, a vote was called; however, a result of the voting was not made known. (It was noted after AC that results were sent to GC.)
- Board of Pension and Health Benefits, Inc. presented 2 petitions relating to 2018 programs and policies: 1) relating to pension and 2) relating to health benefits. For the 7th year in a row, the benefit pension billing to each local church will decrease (in 2018, churches will realize an 8.3% cost reduction). Both petitions were **approved**.
- Conference Board of Trustees presented a petition proposing land purchase, incurring a debt of approximately \$3.3M, and construction of a New Conference Center in Huntersville, N.C. Our current conference center is 42 years old, in need of extensive repairs, and on land owned by Aldersgate (not the Conference). The proposal was **approved**.
- WNC United Methodist Foundation reported that investors enjoyed an 11% return in 2016; 1st quarter of 2017 reflects a 4 to 5% return. The foundation presented a check to Bishop Leeland in the amount of \$20,000 for new church development.

- There were 9 Cabinet resolutions of discontinuance and abandonment; 3 of these churches were in the Appalachian District.
- **Approved** a budget for 2018 of \$16,209,006.00, a 1.19% decrease from the 2017 budget.
- **Approved** the petition to include a celebration for the 50th anniversary of the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church during the 2018 session of the WNC Annual Conference.
- **Approved** the petition, as amended (minor word change), from the Committee on Equitable Compensation proposing a WNCC Arrearage policy (re: pastor compensation).
- Heard reports from the laity of the conference. For the second year in a row, our conference organization of United Methodist Men was recognized as the top group in the country. United Methodist Women continue to lead in the nation for many areas of giving, including Legacy Giving.
- Recognized Rev. Joel Garth Locklear of Bethlehem (Reidsville) UMC – Wentworth with the “One Matters” Discipleship Ministries award.
- Recognized Aaron Pardue of Baltimore UMC with the laity Denman Evangelism Award and Rev. Josh Sherfy of First UMC, Taylorsville, with the Clergy Denman Evangelism Award. Preston Davis, chaplain at High Point University, was awarded the Francis Asbury Award for campus ministry.
- The conference voted yes to review a petition that was submitted after the petition deadline. The petition concerned Senate Bill 594 in the N.C. State Senate that would decrease the number of social service departments from 100 counties to 30 regional offices. The conference **approved** the petition, voting to “strongly oppose North Carolina Senate Bill 594, urge its defeat in the legislature, and recommend to the Governor of North Carolina, Roy Cooper that he veto this law, if approved, so that every county Department of Social Services and infrastructures connected therein throughout North Carolina can promptly and effectively provide the help and care to those who need it the most.”

A complete overview of the entire Annual Conference meeting can be found at: AC2017.org.

Ordinations, Retirements, and Statistics

There were 16 provisional members were commissioned at this Annual Conference.

There were 17 newly ordained clergy at this Annual Conference. Three deacons were ordained.

There were 54 clergy who retired this year with a total of 1,510 years of active service among them.

Membership stands at 282,618, down 1292

Baptisms were 3120, down 263.

Worship attendance stands at 104557 down 3689.

Enrolled in Christian Formation Groups were 114,303, down 4866.

Church school attendance stands at 42191 down 2551.

Professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2016 were 3054, down 796.

Worshippers engaged in mission for 2016 were 75,475, down 3188.

Four Areas of Focus of the UMC in the 2016 – 2020 Quadrennium:

The church is called to be a Christ-centered, disciple-making, transformational community

Vital Congregations: Creating and Sustaining New Places for New People

- One million new disciples who profess their faith through new and renewed communities around the world
- Double the number of highly vital congregations excelling in the five markers of vitality: disciples in worship, new disciples (professions of faith), disciples in small groups, disciples in mission, and giving to mission.

Calling and Shaping Principled Christian Leaders

Equipping 3 million people across the connection to be “difference makers” called out to serve as principled Christian leaders in our world today.

Ministry with the Poor

Build 400 vibrant, flourishing, and transforming communities addressing issues of poverty and ministry with the poor, particularly with children.

Abundant Health for All

Reach 1 million children with life-saving interventions.

The 2018 Annual Conference is scheduled June 21-24, 2018 at Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center.