



Friday, June 17, 2016

North Carolina Annual Conference



Memorial Service remembers 47

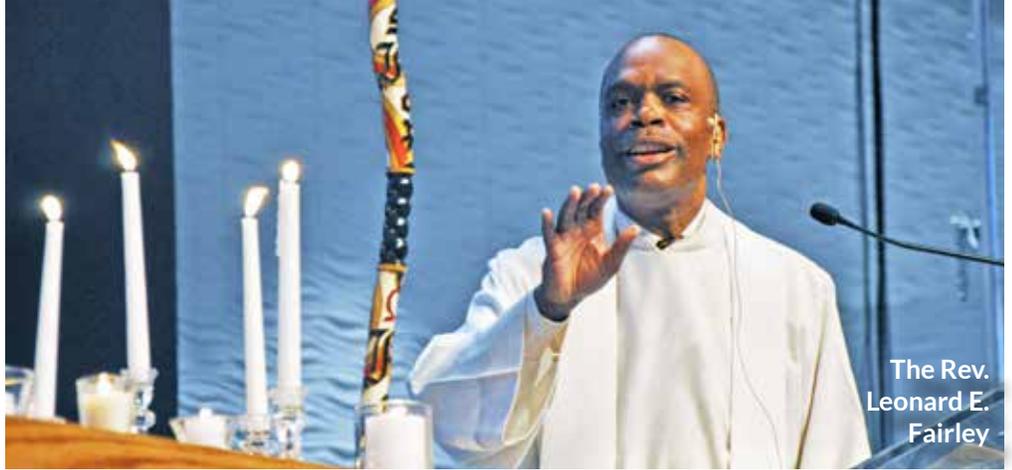
With a clergy processional, Annual Conference 2016 of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church began with the All Saints Celebration and Memorial Service. Candles covered the altar and set an atmosphere of holiness and reverence.

“As you are seated, look to your left and to your right and there you see the saints of God,” said Bishop Hope Morgan Ward as she greeted the congregation. “As we gather at this table, we celebrate the holy feast, giving thanks for the feast in heaven.”

The names of the saints were read in a solemn tone and a bell was tolled as congregants stood to remember their loved ones. The Reverend Leonard Fairley, Capital District Superintendent, offered the sermon message reminding all of the importance of the example set by the saints who have passed on.

Do you not understand that even the breath you breathe is borrowed?

– Bishop Gregory V. Palmer



The Rev. Leonard E. Fairley

Generous Saints: Opening Worship

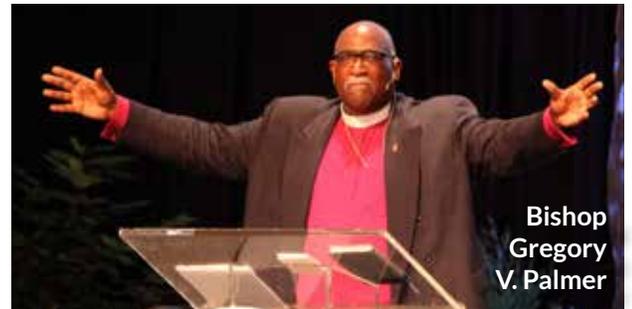
The opening worship All Saints Celebration celebrated the generous examples of giving and service offered by the clergy and the spouses of clergy who have transitioned to be with the great cloud of witnesses. We are reminded of their selfless dedication and service.

In his sermon, the Reverend Leonard Fairley, District Superintendent of the Capital District, talked of how he learned generosity from his grandmother, Gladys, and from his mother. As a child, he recalled watching his grandmother’s hands as she made “Grandma Biscuits” appear. “This lady would take what she had prepared for her family, and she would invite anybody within earshot, anybody within the neighborhood, anybody who just happened to be at our house. She would invite them to the table,” he shared.

Fairley’s mother and grandmother made bread and

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Missions Celebration: A Night of Great Gifts



Bishop Gregory V. Palmer

The Thursday evening worship began with energetic praise and worship led by the gifted Praise team from Fuquay-Varina UMC. The gathering music by the Praise Band stirred the youth to dance through the convention hall.

Jaye White, Outreach Ministry Team Coordinator and Project AGAPE missionary in Armenia, Nara Melkonyan, engaged in a conversation about how Project AGAPE is assisting thousands of Syrian refugees who are fleeing war and strife to Armenia. Project Agape has been able to provide food, clothing,

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Praising God at the Laity Executive Session



Laity Executive Session: Showing Love & Light

On Thursday afternoon, the lay members of Annual Conference gathered for laity executive session. After a time of singing, Conference Lay Leader Gary Locklear greeted the full room of laity. He introduced the Conference Board of Laity while reminding the group of this quadrennial theme, “From Strength to Strength” and the 2016 theme “Give.”

Steve Taylor, Director of Connectional Ministries, prayed, calling the laity to show love and to shine a light as they live in God’s way of being.

A report from UMM President, Paul Wilson, exemplified the UMM’s mission of making disciples of men. As Wilson remarked, “We are not just for breakfast anymore.” He went on to share some of the accomplishments of the UMM in local churches, including Jarvis Memorial UMC’s recognition as the third best UMM unit in the USA.

UMW President, JoAnn Barbour, spoke how the UMW of the conference shared how the UMW works with organizations in North Carolina to reduce human trafficking and mass incarceration. They also work to deepen the spiritual lives of women. She ended by issuing a challenge to all members to make the world a better place through their actions.

The Conference’s Home Missioners and Deaconesses were also recognized in the session, as their service remains vital to the Conference’s thriving lay ministry.

Christine Dodson, Conference Treasurer, thanked members for giving their time and energy as to attend Annual Conference. She provided an overview of Conference logistics, helping members to have a clearer understanding of how the business of the Conference operates.

Jacob Blount brought a brief update from youth ministry and announced that Annual Conference 2016 set a record for youth attendance.

***Mission Endowment
Special Offering
\$9,189.57***

Clergy Executive Session: Celebrating God’s Call

Every year, the clergy gather in executive session to celebrate those who are retiring, welcome new Elders and Deacons in Full Connection, and Provisional Elders and Deacons. There are also prayers for those who are on leave from ministry.

The Clergy Executive Session began with song followed by a short report from Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, who shared highlights from the last four years of ministry for the Annual Conference.

It has been a busy four years! The conference has intentionally engaged with those who serve in the military, their families, those who are veterans, and their families.

A new ministry was begun in conjunction with the Western North Carolina Annual Conference to reach out to children. Congregations for Children [C4C] equips and empowers local congregations to be in ministry with the local schools, especially those which have high numbers of children in poverty.

Bishop Ward shared a unique opportunity for churches because the 15th anniversary of the attacks on September 11 falls on a Sunday in 2016. In order to equip clergy to preach and teach around this difficult moment of remembrance, they are invited to a gathering, “Let Us Remember,” to talk about preaching in the midst of difficulty. The event is on August 11 at St. Luke’s UMC in Sanford. Bishop Will Willimon will be the guest teacher and will help give pastors words of hope and encouragement in the midst of tragedy.

***Imagine No Malaria
Challenge
\$1,112,877
Raised 2014-16
Saving \$111,288 Lives!***

The gathering time ended with clergy giving a standing ovation to the retiring clergy, the men and women who represent a rich history of mission and ministry around the North Carolina Annual Conference.

Thursday Business: CCT Changes, Mission Endowment

As the strains of “And Are We Yet Alive” swelled in the Greenville Convention Center, the North Carolina Annual Conference began its official work for 2016. The business of doing the work together proceeded quickly as the rules were adopted, with changes made to reflect the shift from a constituency-based Conference Connectional Table to a membership-based model with 12 at-large voting members. Rules Committee chair, Ellen McCubbin, noted that the change would allow for “keeping values at the center of vision” and a “quicker and easier alignment of values and vision” as the Connectional Table continues its work of leading and resourcing the annual conference.

Bishop Ward and Conference Lay Leader Gary Locklear opened the conference with a word from Psalm 84, reminding members that “God’s love flows to and through us and outward from us to the world.” The Bishop offered words of celebration that The United Methodist Church has raised \$68.5 million for Imagine No Malaria and the North Carolina Conference exceeded its \$1 million goal by giving \$1,112,877, saving 111,288 lives.

The Mission Endowment is beginning to fund projects

working toward comprehensive housing initiatives and the development of a church within a Harnett county prison. Giving to the Mission Endowment provides resources for new missions within the North Carolina Conference. A special offering received today for the Mission Endowment Fund totaled \$9,189.57.

Speaking on behalf on this year’s class of retiring clergy, Dennis Sheppard quoted Robert Frost: “For I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep,” as he reflected on the journey of a pastor’s life from ordination through retirement and beyond. The conference rose in applause and appreciation of the years of service, love, and leadership represented by the 26 retirees.

Carl Frazier, speaking on behalf of the United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH), offered a lost and found story from the UMPH’s recent move of headquarters, in which a copy of a Francis Asbury booklet called “The Causes, Evil, and Cures of Heart and Church Division” was rediscovered. The booklet, timely for the current day, has been updated and given to the Council of Bishops and delegates to General Conference 2016. Cokesbury Community Resource Consultant, Michael Boone, presented a copy of the Deep Blue Children’s Storybook to Bishop Ward, urging her to share it with a child.

Financial Reports Passed

Thursday afternoon was a day of numbers as the conference members heard reports from the various committees in the area of Stewardship.



Sheila Ahler, CF&A Chair

Sheila Ahler, chair of the Conference Council on Finance Administration [CF&A], expressed appreciation for the 91.4% of the apportionments that were paid in 2015. She noted that the NC Conference was one of 26 conferences that fully paid apportionments to the General Conference through the use of reserve funds.

The salary for district superintendents in 2017 was approved at \$108,080, an increase of 1.95% over the current salary.

Annual Conference members approved the request of \$21,908,352 for the 2018 annual conference budget.

Chaplain Dave Smith spoke about the Soul Care Initiative, resourcing churches to help returning veterans and their families reintegrate into the community. Spiritual care is an underserved ministry of helping veterans return and recover from the trauma of war. There are over 740,000 veterans living in the state of North Carolina, almost ten percent of the state’s population, many with injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. Soul Care wants to help churches help veterans find hospitality and spiritual care to create a climate of healing and care.

The Order of Deacons celebrated 20 years as an order with a video surveying a wide range of roles deacons fill in churches and communities. “I am called to Word and Service, Justice and Compassion,” said one deacon. Deacons spoke about ministry of worship, education, and youth within congregations, of helping people move toward healing, with businesspeople, and with local community members. “Something about connecting the church to the world made my heart sing,” said Rev. Erin Roesch. Betty Ann Buckley, speaking on behalf of the order, encouraged conference attenders to celebrate the ministry of deacons and to visit a prayer through art station located in the convention center.

Insurance

The conference has a self-insured health plan which Blue Cross and Blue Shield administers. The health insurance plan approved for 2017, a 2.5% increase over 2016, is \$1,082.74 a month for the church’s portion; clergy portions rose at the same percentage rate. Dental coverage and life insurance were unchanged. Alan Swartz, chair of the Insurance Committee, advised the conference that the committee is evaluating the industry landscape for health insurance group plans and the annual conference should anticipate changes in plan offerings

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Generous Saints from page 1

after the bread was made to feed their family, it was also used to bless others in the community. He reminded those gathered of how they took what little they had that was blessed, and it was used as blessing to others.

His sermon emphasized those who have gone to join the great cloud of witnesses in heaven including pastors who shepherded their congregations.

“Today, we gather and we remember those who have taught us about generosity. Hands that have remembered us in prayer. Hands that have wiped tears from our eyes. Hands that have lifted us up when we have fallen. Hands that have embraced us during the passing of the peace when we have come to the table of the Lord.”

Fairley’s sermon, entitled *Generous Saints*, was grounded in the scriptures from John 6:1-13, where Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish. He reminded those gathered that the problem that day was not from a true lack of food nor was it a lack of witnesses to share and give to one’s neighbors. On the hillside where Jesus questioned Phillip about being able to feed the multitude, Fairley said the problem was our own scarcity mentality holding us back from giving. The miracle of the fish and loaves is one of God’s generous abundance.

“Surely, if God could take the meager lunch of a small boy and feed 5,000 people, certainly God can take what we release from our hands, no matter how small and no matter how insignificant and bless the world.”

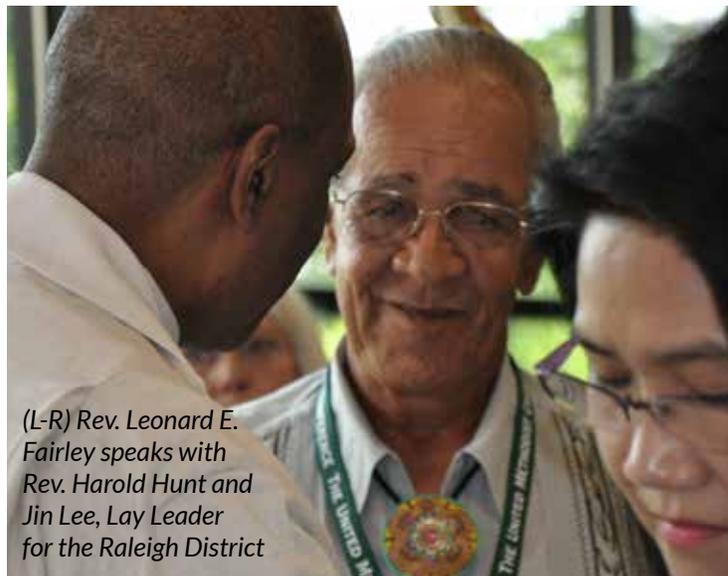
The desire to give and give generously is all about being a blessing to others. Reverend Fairley stated the following, “What we put in Jesus’ hands never returns void.”

There can be no blessings with closed hands.

— *The Rev. Leonard Fairley*



Deaconess Melba McCallum helping lead opening worship



(L-R) Rev. Leonard E. Fairley speaks with Rev. Harold Hunt and Jin Lee, Lay Leader for the Raleigh District

He shared the story of his neighbor, Fred, who had the uncanny knack of appearing when Fairley’s mother had baked fresh bread. After his brother, Calvin, took one biscuit and gave it to Fred, his sister, Sheila, called out to their mother to tell on him. Fred ran and hid under the porch, and the children all listened to his mother’s footsteps draw near. Sheila told what Calvin had done, and his mother asked where Fred was. Coming out from under the porch, Fred had crumbs on his mouth. The blessing and the lesson of that day was that Fairley’s mother invited Fred to the table, saying, “Come on, and sit down and eat with us.”

“You see, Jesus does not cause a miracle just to spring up out of nowhere,” said Fairley. “Jesus uses ordinary people who are unafraid to put into the hands of Jesus Christ all that they have and all that they are, and Jesus uses the gifts in each of us to cause miracles to break out all around us. God uses ordinary people.”

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— *The Rev. Leonard Fairley*

The generosity of those ordinary people is an example to all. “If there is anything that characterizes a saint, it is this: saints are extravagant givers who have this habit of sharing from a place of God’s abundance,” said Fairley. “There can be no blessing with closed hands.”

“If we are in doubt that God is a generous God, then all we need to do is come to the table,” that God can take what little each has and make it great. “As we remember those who have gone on to be with the Lord,” Fairley said, “I want you to reach deep into yourselves and ask yourself, ‘What has the person that I remembered today taught me about living a generous life?’”

Financial Reports

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over the next few years, including adding options for consumer-driven health plan offerings.

Pension

The report of the Board of Pension was presented by Cashar Evans, chair of the board. Before 1982, the conference funded retirement benefits for pastors from yearly budgets. Under this Pre-82 Plan for retirement, clergy will receive \$717 per service year. Since 1982, retirement for each pastor is based on individual investments with the General Board of Pension.

Retiree health care is administered by a designated vendor to help retirees select Medicare secondary coverage from the open market. Each year, an amount is set aside for each retiree in a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA), based on the number of years they were in the conference health plan. In 2017, the maximum HRA for a pastor with 40 years or more in the plan will be funded at \$3,152 (90% of the maximum tier of \$3,502).

Equitable Compensation

The minimum salary for full-time pastors for 2017 was proposed to remain the same as the 2016 salary of \$42,617 and \$27,701 for student pastors. The report was amended and then approved to increase minimum salary by 2.8% to a salary of \$43,810 for full-time pastors and \$28,477 for student pastors.

LaNella Smith, chair of the Commission on Equitable Compensation, pointed out that the minimum salary approved by conference is not meant to be the ceiling of a pastor's salary. Rather, congregations should take into account the work of the pastor and set a fair and just wage in the context within that church.

Trustees

Ferrell Blount, chair of the Board of Trustees, reviewed the work of the board and the proposed agreement language for the Mission Endowment Fund to be overseen by the trustees and Mission Endowment Committee. The endowment will permanently restrict donations to the fund and earnings will be used for missional grants for new mission and ministry within the NC Conference. The report including the endowment agreement was approved as proposed.

Clergy Medical Leave

The report of the Joint Committee on Clergy Medical Leave was approved as presented in the conference workbook with informational updates and no change to policy.



We celebrate the 42 youth lay members at AC2016!



Thursday afternoon saw voting on finance reports including Insurance, Board of Pension, Equitable Compensation, Board of Trustees, Clergy Medical Leave.



Many folks are helping make this day possible including the smiling faces at the registration desk



Listening to reports from the finance-related committees and boards 5

Missions Celebration

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and shelter. Project Agape is fully supported by the North Carolina Conference and the Western North Carolina Conference.

The guest preacher for the evening was Bishop Gregory V. Palmer of the Ohio West Episcopal Area, who spoke powerfully about how relevant the writings of Paul and his letters to New Testament churches are to the struggles within the Church today. These texts speak about how the people of God are to live together despite controversy and disagreements.

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

— 1 Corinthians 4:7

Grounding his message in the text, “What do you have that you have not received?” (1 Corinthians 4:7), Palmer reminded worshipers that “there is no such thing as a ‘self-made person.’ Even the breath we breathe is God’s. What do we have that we have not received?”

The wreckage of history demonstrates that

humans cannot fix this world. Humans take the gifts of God and mold them into items for war and conflict.

Through grace and mercy, God narrated a different story; through God’s Son, Jesus Christ, comes hope, love and peace. “God, in Christ, saw fit that our past didn’t need to define our future.”

It is vital to remember that Paul was writing to “church people” who were arguing about “apostleship” and their giftedness; they were clamoring for recognition and authority rather than serving selflessly. They had forgotten that all they had was a gift from God.



Spirited worship music on Thursday evening inspired many of the youth to dance through the conference room.



Could this very well describe churches today, expecting to be rewarded for every action; expecting “credit” for all actions and offerings; expecting a certificate for every little accomplishment?

“Don’t get too enamored with your goodness. The playing field is level at the foot of the cross. The goody-two-shoes have got to stand with the reprobate.” Whether laity or clergy, whether a big church or small – God has already given everything needed to take the next step in obedience and faith. Churches need fewer certificates and more missionaries; fewer committee members and more apostles. “If we are going to be generous people . . . we must begin to see everything as a gift. We don’t have a money deficit. We’ve got a gratitude deficit. What do we have that we have not received?”

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— Bishop Gregory V. Palmer



The praise team from Fuquay-Varina UMC