



Saturday, June 18, 2016

North Carolina Annual Conference

Honoring 20 Years of the Call of the Deacon



The conference was blessed with a video *I Am Called*, which interprets the ministry of Deacons. Deacons are called to help, called to Word, service, justice and compassion; called to move beyond the walls, to be the hands and feet of Jesus and lead others; called to see where God has worked, is working and will be working in the future; called to teaching; called to connect members with community, to create community around the Table; and to take the Table of Love and Faith into the world. The presentation ended asking: "Where Is God Calling You?"

Fruitful Connectional Ministries Are Reaching Out into the World

Congregations for Children (C4C)

Pat Litzinger presented a report from the NC Conference Congregations 4 Children (C4C) committee during the Connectional Ministries report on Friday morning at Annual Conference 2016. He shared that at this point in the project, 83% of NC Conference congregations have embraced C4C to help with the donation of books and deployment of tutors and volunteers. Thanks was expressed to the conference C4C committee, district representatives of C4C, and the Duke Endowment Fund for their funding efforts. Recently, the Council of Bishops announced that church-school partnership development will be one of the key mission focuses for the whole denomination for the next quadrennium.



Ganta Mission Station

Rev. Jaye White introduced Rev. Priscilla Jaiah, a General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) missionary and esteemed guest of the NC Annual Conference, to share about the Ganta Mission Station in Liberia.

Rev. Jaiah brought greetings

Friday's Laity Celebration

Each Friday afternoon at Annual Conference, members celebrate the thriving lay ministries of the North Carolina Conference. Bishop Hope Morgan Ward began by acknowledging the service of Conference Lay Leader, Gary Locklear in the current and upcoming quadrennium.

Gary Locklear asked members of the Conference Board of Laity to think about how we measure lay ministries in the conference and their impact upon the conference. Locklear promised that this would be shared in a unique way during the celebration.

Locklear recognized Abby Martin, Conference Youth President, to address the body. Martin began her address by calling on members to shake the dust that sometimes settles on the pages of their hearts. As Conference Youth President this year, Martin made two promises to youth: that they would shake the dust from their lives so they could see God's calling for them and that they would shake out the old and bring in the new. Both of these promises were kept because of the incredible work of the youth this year.

She saw youth witnessing to others as they came to Conference Youth Events and experienced the love of God. She also recognized the support of Conference laity, clergy, and staff of Conference Youth Events, as the youth ministry could not thrive without their unending support and constantly reminding the youth that they are loved.

To further celebrate the many lay ministries of our conference, Jay Locklear invited members to participate in a spirited game of

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NCC General Conference Delegation's Report

Friday morning, the NCC General Conference delegation offered their report in the form of prayers. The Rev. Gray Southern, opened the presentation, saying, "Your sisters and brothers who were honored to go as delegates...ask you to pray with us as we offer prayers of thanksgiving for what God did through that conference, prayers of confession for what we did and did not do, and prayers of hope for what God has done and is doing through us, The United Methodist Church."



Duncan McMillan

Layperson LaNella Smith shared, "I love to sing, and at General Conference we sang such spirit-filled songs with wonderful engaging words. I have imagined...what might our denomination be if we lived out the words that we sang?"

The Rev. Bob Bergland prayed, "O God, as we bow before you, we confess our bent to fear...Forgive us for giving into our fears rather than trusting you. We lift our gratitude to you for the outpouring of joy and power as the Holy Spirit moved upon the General Conference - opening our ears and our voices, our hearts and our minds to what You are doing and will continue to do within The United Methodist Church."

The Rev. Laura Ledford shared "As I reflect on General Conference, I confess my own impatience, and I give thanks that we can trust in the slow work of God. And through that slow work, God will use messy, broken, and beautiful people to bring the kingdom more fully on earth and that is good news."

Layperson Duncan McMillan prayed, "I give thanks for a United Methodist Church that recognizes its differences, its global nature, but ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in kingdom-building. I give thanks for a church that invites all to the table, whether

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Friday morning saw a number of breakout sessions including one on the Congregations for Children Initiative. Sound District Superintendent Linda Taylor and the Rev. Avery C. Brown, Presiding Elder of the Beaufort District of the AME Zion Church, shared about an after school tutoring partnership between the districts.

Our 2016-17 New Faith Communities

1. Rolesville Campus of Wake Forest UMC - Tyler Williams
2. Union Campus of All God's Children - Amanda Brown
3. Colerain Campus of All God's Children - Cheryl Bowen
4. Enfield Campus of All God's Children - Laura Early
5. Crossroads West Fayetteville Campus - Nick Rich & Annette Ethridge
6. Frog Level Missional Community with St. James: Greenville - Ryan Dunn

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from the Liberian Annual Conference and expressed thanks for the support that the NC Annual Conference has shown for the work of the Ganta Mission Station.

SHIFT

Steve Taylor, Executive Director of Connectional Ministries, presented the report on SHIFT, a group of congregational teams working to build our vitality in the goal of making disciples for the transformation of the world. SHIFT follows four main tiers of "shifting" from one thing to another. Shifting from Fellowship to Hospitality, Worship as Event to Worship as Lifestyle, Membership to Discipleship, and Self to Others. He further introduced Rev. Trey Harris of Sandy Plains UMC in Pembroke to share his personal experience with SHIFT. He shared that "SHIFT has changed our congregation, and the mindset of our congregation, for the better." Steve Taylor shared that a new cohort of churches is being sought for more SHIFT training to start in the Fall.

MERCI Center

Following the SHIFT report, Steve Taylor concluded the Connectional Ministries report in sharing about the rededication of the Marion Edwards Recovery Center Initiative (MERCI), "a place of mission and ministry that for 16 years for local and global doings of outreach, love, and action." A video shared Bishop Edwards' desire for the UMC to respond to the disaster of Hurricane Floyd in 1999, which marked the beginning of MERCI. Ann Huffman, the Disaster Readiness/Volunteer Coordinator of the NC Conference, shared of the work of MERCI over the last 16 years.



(L-R) Linda Edwards Foster, Gary Locklear, Steve Taylor

Friday Business Included Resolutions, Nominations

Friday's afternoon session opened with reports from the Duke Endowment and Jeff Severt for New Faith Communities. Severt announced the appointment of Greg Moore as the new director of New Faith Communities. In addition, Severt announced the 2016 "starting line-up" for New Faith Communities.

Rich Vaughan of Golden Cross spoke of what it means to be able to offer support to laity under the burden of high medical expenses. The Golden Cross fund offers a \$2500 grant to families with crippling medical debt. Vaughan challenged churches in the conference to celebrate Golden Cross Sunday on August 21, and to raised \$100 per church per week until then. The resulting \$84,000 collection would allow Golden Cross to double the grant offering to families like the 18 helped in the past year.

Alan Swartz brought the resolutions before the conference. The first, a Resolution of Thanksgiving for Dr. Dewey Clark and North Carolina Wesleyan College, passed overwhelmingly and was celebrated with prayer by Bishop Ward. The second, detailing nine action steps for churches to support public education, was amended from the floor to ask leaders to write to their legislators to share these concerns, and also to send it to state newspapers, and was also passed with no dissent.

Bishop Ward led the conference in a moment of observance of the anniversary of the killings at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, SC, singing Lift Every Voice and Sing as an act of hope and continued prayer for reconciliation.

Larry Bowden spoke about refugee resettlement, opening by asking conference members to imagine what it might feel like to get on a plane for the first time, having lost all their possessions, and fly for many hours to a new and strange land, which will become their new homes. Ministry with refugees

is deeply embedded in the Methodist tradition. There is information on the conference website for congregations and leaders.

Erin Roesch spoke for Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries, urging the conference to be in ministry for those in or returning from prison or jail and their families. Each church is asked to tie a purple ribbon around a tree in front of the church as a sign of welcome to all God's people, including those coming home from prison and their families and to offer community and connection.

Communications Director Derek Leek spoke via video about the Communications ministry of the annual conference, including ECHO (Every Church Online), Every Day Grace magazine and television show, and encouraged members to connect with the conference via website, email, and social media.

Christine Dodson brought the Nominations report, with some modifications from the committee and from the floor. Extensive changes were made to the Hispanic/Latino ministry team by the team itself, to better facilitate their work. The report, as amended, was approved. Ken Ripley encouraged the committee to consider including disability as they consider other ways to ensure diverse membership and participation in the conference's committees and ministries.

Reporting for the Academy of Leadership Excellence, Bill Gattis and AFLE Program Director Judy Stephens introduced the members of Cohort 2 of Project Bountiful, a collaboration of the annual conference, The Duke Endowment, and the AFLE, to develop leadership in smaller rural churches. These members came forward to lay hands on members of Cohort 3 as the Bishop led a prayer for them.



(L-R) Bishop Hope Morgan Ward honored the Rev. Dennis Peay for his work with the NC Conference Youth Ministry from 2008-2016 as the Rev. Taylor Mills looked on.

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answers and questions called "Laity Give!" The game provided clues describing the thriving lay ministries in our annual conference, such as Deaconesses and Home Missioners. It also featured statistics showing the time and money given to ministries such as Imagine No Malaria, Backpack Buddies, food pantries, and Stop Hunger Now, among others. "Laity Give!" served as a fun reminder of the powerful impact of lay ministries in local churches, within the Conference, and throughout the world.

Statistician's Report

On Friday afternoon, George Speake, Conference Statistician presented the report. He stated that virtually all membership and participation declined in 2015 over the previous year. There were fewer baptisms, professions of faith, reception of members and transfers more to other denominations. Speake stated he had not seen this much decline in 20 years. The average worship attendance was 74,450 or 2,446 less than 2014. In addition, there was a loss of 1,101 in membership, resulting in a new total of 228,611.

Churches are spending more money for church programming and accomplished \$17.5 million in building improvements. Speake encouraged all lay and clergy to spend time this summer and fall preparing for the annual January reporting period. He reminded everyone that money spent by the local church is reported on Table II and this is the only report that is used to calculate apportionments. It is therefore important that records are correct.

Soul-Stirring Music, Missions, and Preaching from Bishop Palmer Friday Evening

The Friday evening worship service began with soul-stirring music delivered by the choir from Prospect United Methodist Church in Maxton. The music set the tone for a celebratory event of the ministries of the laity. The Order of Deacons led the worship service.

Guest preacher, Bishop Gregory Palmer presented a plaque to Bishop Hope Morgan Ward and Gary Locklear, Conference Lay Leader to celebrate the conference effort on behalf of Imagine No Malaria which raised almost \$1,121,000.

There was discussion of the Mission of Hope for Sierra Leone which deals with the rebuilding of Rotifunk Hospital in Sierra Leone to serve to over 145,000 people. It was apparent in the presentation that this ministry would take more than just financial assistance; the true need is “hands” to change the plight of the people in Sierra Leone especially the morbidity and mortality rates of children and infants.

The 70 percent level of illiteracy has a direct impact upon gainful employment that could be utilized to help pull the country and its people out of abject poverty but also provides an opportunity for the Church to be in practical life-changing ministry.

The stage was set for Bishop Palmer’s sermon, using Luke 24:28-32 as the biblical foundation. Bishop Palmer reiterated that each person needs to live into the fact that everyone they meet is a beloved child of God. The question was posed that if people who we encounter for the first time would leave with the impression that they were beloved and treasured.

Bishop Palmer also reminded the gathered that Christians are to be the Church and to not spend time trying to save the church. The Church belongs to God and only God can change the church. This sermon set the tone to reinvigorate and reorient the thinking of both the laity and clergy to understand that the Gospel is a gift to be shared and to realize that we all are the beloved of God.

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or not they agree with each other. A denomination that is rooted in tradition, scripture, reason, and experience.”

Conference Lay Leader Gary Locklear prayed, “We ask you, Lord, to perfect what we have continued. Guide those to be asked to further our dialogue across long-standing divisions and fears. Let us face the future unafraid, empower to be your Church, and looking for your life alive in us, united in You.”

Annual Conference members were invited to contact any of the delegates if they are interested in helping arrange an event in a local church or district to summarize the General Conference proceedings and experience.



(L-R) Gary Locklear, Gray Southern, Leonard Fairley

Fairley endorsed by AC members as episcopal nominee

Delegation announced nominee for the office of bishop is the Rev. Leonard E. Fairley. Annual Conference members stood to endorse Fairley as nominee for the office of Bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. Election of bishops takes place during the SE Jurisdictional Conference this summer at Lake Junaluska.

In his acceptance, Fairley shared, “There are no words to even begin to let you know the sense of great humility and honor that is coursing through my spirit right now. The closest I words I can come to are the words that Bishop Palmer used last night, ‘What is it that you have that you have not received?’ You are my family. You are the hands that have made miracles work in my life and in the life across this annual conference. I know that there are many difficult days ahead and many obstacles that we must face, but I just have the audacity to believe that the best years of the church are not behind it. It is in front of us. I have the audacity to believe this: in the words of my wife, Priscilla, ‘If we can just see the possibilities and live the promise, because even a miracle needs a hand.’ You have no idea of the miracles God has worked in my life, and this is one of them.”

NCC Director of Communications:

Derek Leek

AC 2016 Communications Team:

Nathaniel Belles, Jacob Blount, Julie Brown, Marty Cauley, Suzanne Cobb, Chris Daniel, Mary Warren Dickens, Christine Dodson, John Hall, James Henderson, Jay Locklear, Mary Frances McClure, Joe Parker, Anne Sims, Chuck Smith, George Speake, LeeAnne Thornton