

The Minutes of The 53rd Session of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church Meeting in Annual Conference on June 18, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 health crises, the 2020 Annual Conference was held virtually instead of the Greenville Convention Center as originally planned.

At 10:00 a.m., Bishop Hope Morgan Ward welcomed the Annual Conference members. The session opened with a worship service. The Hymn sung throughout the worship was “And Are We Yet Alive?” Musicians were Christopher Jackson, Duda Dial, and Paula Jones. Gary Locklear led an opening prayer. Scripture was read by Donna Banks, Gayle Tabor, Daryl DeCotis, Jason Villegas, and Sang-Seon Park. Jaime Thompson prayed for the families of the clergy and clergy spouses who had died since the last Annual Conference while their names were shown on a slide. This was followed by a litany of lament for the world situation. Bishop Ward was the preacher. A Love Feast was led by Nathan and Laura Wittman. The worship service ended with singing “Lift High the Cross.”

Plenary Session

The Plenary session was called to order at 10:45 a.m. by Bishop Ward. Cooper Sykes, Conference UMYF president, opened in prayer. Appreciation was expressed for Jerry Bryan and Ellen McCubbin. Conference Secretary Jerry Bryan welcomed the Annual Conference and led the ordering procedures. Ellen McCubbin reviewed the rules and procedures which were previously adopted. She also explained how the rules were created for this unique situation and reminded the Annual Conference that all decisions made would be ratified at the 2021 Annual Conference. Bishop Ward gave instructions on voting for the virtual annual conference and the voting began. Deadline for voting was June 25th with the results reported on July 7th.

Gray Southern, Chair of the Committee on the Episcopacy, was introduced to give the report of the committee. He explained that all retiring bishops in the Southeastern Jurisdiction would remain in their positions until after the next Jurisdictional Conference rescheduled for November 2021. Bishop Ward will remain as bishop of the North Carolina Annual Conference until that time.

Melba McCallum, Partners in Ministries, introduced a video from Healthy Congregations on the Conference COVID-19 response and announced a special offering that would be received for this fund. Ernesto Barriguete, Director of Multicultural Ministries offered prayer.

Christine Dodson, Conference Treasurer, was introduced by Bishop Ward to give an update on the General and Jurisdictional Conferences. She announced that Edie Gleaves would be the

Episcopal nominee from the North Carolina Annual Conference. Jerry Bryan prayed for the Delegation.

Bishop Ward introduced the Board of Laity members and thanked Gary Locklear, Conference Lay Leader, for his work. Mr. Locklear made comments on the Nominations Committee process.

Bishop Ward thanked the Committee on Disaster Response for their recovery efforts following Hurricane Dorian and their response to COVID-19. She offered a prayer of thanksgiving for Al Miller, Disaster Response Coordinator, along with God's care during these disasters.

Bishop Ward introduced Gary Locklear, Conference Lay Leader, and thanked him for his service for the last eight years. Mr. Locklear gave an overview of lay ministries during this past year and thanked the Conference for its support during his tenure. He commented on the nomination of John Hall to be the next Conference Lay Leader. Bishop led a prayer of thanksgiving for all those serving in mission and ministry for the last four years. A "Thank You" video about Lay Ministries in the Conference was shown.

Bishop Ward described the work of the Society of St. Andrew and their gleaning ministries. A video of a potato drop at the MERCI Center was shown.

Following an introduction of the Nominations Report by Bishop Ward, Christine Dodson, Conference Treasurer, gave the report of the Committee on Nominations. Ms. Dodson referred the Conference to page 57 of the Conference Workbook for the Report. She highlighted structural changes to the Annual Conference Committees. The list of specific committee nominations can be found on page 58. The following corrections were noted: on page 60, correction of the spelling for the name Jerrod Davis, and on page 62, Molly White's demographic designation should be changed to Clergy. On page 70 - for the Board of Pension, add Rhonda Grant Jordan (AA/B-F-C) per the Workbook addendum. On page 73 in the District Committees and Boards section, for the Committee on the District Superintendency and the Board of Trustees, remove Madison Hankal and add Wallace Johnson. For the District Committee on Ordained Ministry, correct the spelling of Sarah Capel, and for the Board of Church Location and Building, the demographic for Lee Clyburn is Lay Male. On page 75 for the Harbor District Board of Ordained Ministry, remove Eddie Hill and add David Goehring. On page 76, for the Sound District Board of Ordained Ministry, correct the spelling of the name of Johnnie Wright.

Bishop Ward recognized Christine Dodson, Conference Treasurer, to lead the Financial Reports. She gave an overview of giving in churches throughout the annual conference and reported that 2020 apportionment giving was down 9%. The Financial Reports can be found beginning on page 9 of the Conference Workbook.

Anne Lloyd, chairperson, presented the report of the Conference Committee on Finance and Administration. She cited a 4.52% reduction in the budget resulting in a reduction of apportionments in the future. There will be no changes to the salaries of the District Superintendents. The 2019 audit was given a clean and unmodified report.

Scott Dodson, chairperson, presented the report of the Insurance Committee which can be found on page 27 of the Conference Workbook. The Conference will continue with a self-funded insurance plan. Changes include an increase of \$5 for all doctor visit copays and an 8% increase in premiums for both individuals and churches. The life insurance costs and benefits remain unchanged and the premium for the dental plan will increase by 5.5% with no changes to benefits.

Dennis Goodwin, chairperson of the Board of Pensions, presented the report. He stated that all unfunded pension liabilities are now fully funded. This Board's report can be found on page 32 of the Conference Workbook. The primary actions include a 2.5% increase to \$793.00 per service year for pensions under the Pre-1982 plan, implementation of the approved changes to the Transition Fund, a 0.3% decrease in the clergy retirement benefit, and a 3% increase in the Health Reimbursement Account annual funding for retirees, with a 3% future increase assumption. The 2020 Retirees would be recognized at the 2021 Annual Conference.

Johnnie Wright, chairperson, presented the report of the Commission on Equitable Compensation. This report can be found on page 50 of the Conference Workbook. The recommendation of the Commission is that the minimum salary for 2021 remain at the current level for both full-time and student pastors. The report of the study on student pastor salaries that was to be brought to the 2020 Annual Conference would be delayed until the 2021 Annual Conference so that it could be more fully discussed. No changes to Medical Leave would occur.

Christine Dodson concluded the report by stating that the Trustees Report can be found on-line and has been mailed to those receiving their information by post. Bishop Ward reminded the Annual Conference to vote.

Bishop Ward recognized the work of the Cabinet and named the District Superintendents who are moving to new appointments or retiring from their service. Those completing their time on the Cabinet are Edie Gleaves, Randy Innes, Linda Taylor, Ray Broadwell, and Tim Russell. Bishop Ward prayed for them.

The New Faith Communities Report was given by Greg Moore, director of New Faith Communities. The report has two main focuses: leadership development and congregational development. Lisa Yebuah invited anyone with a calling to develop a new faith community to contact her.

To begin the setting of appointments, Bishop Ward thanked all pastors who are remaining in their current appointment, pastors in transition and their congregations, and all Pastor-Parish

Relations Committees. A video was shown of each District Superintendent as they prayed for the new appointments in their district while their names were shown. Bishop Ward offered a prayer to set the appointments.

New members of the Cabinet were named: Tara Lain (Harbor), Ismael Ruiz-Millan (Heritage), Jon Strother (Sound), Dena White (Fairway), and Beth Hood (Assistant to the Bishop). Bishop Ward welcomed them and prayed for them.

Ernesto Barriguete invited the Annual Conference to participate in Multicultural Ministries Sunday on June 28th. A special offering would be received to be given to the Navajo Nation through Four Corners Ministry in New Mexico. Bishop Ward encouraged giving generously to this offering.

Bishop Ward gave some of the history of Juneteenth and invited members of the Annual Conference to participate in *I Still Can't Breathe* on-line scheduled for June 18th at 7:00 p.m. The Bishop also encouraged reading and signing "The Summons" on the Conference website.

Announcements included a reminder of the planned in-person Clergy Executive Session on September 19th, and Pilgrimage currently planned to be held in-person. Bishop Ward said to "stay tuned" for further information.

The Annual Conference concluded with the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory" led by Jay Locklear. Bishop Hope gave the benediction at 12:32 p.m.