



Rooted in Our Baptism

Thursday Wrap-Up

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022



North Carolina Conference
The United Methodist Church

“We Are No Longer Going to Run Away From This Sin of Racism”

At the close of Thursday night’s Diversity Celebration (see page 3), Bishop Leonard Fairley quietly issued a heartfelt challenge to those gathered:

“I hope that what we have seen tonight provokes us in our hearts and in our spirits to understand truly that racism is an evil thing. We should not be afraid to confess that. It is evil because when we allow it to move us, we miss this [points to the worship leaders.]”

“These are brothers and sisters within the bounds of our own Annual Conference. In their service tonight, they are welcoming us, imploring us to hear their story, and not only hear their story, but to take action.”

“One of the joys that I received when I first came back to North Carolina was that I made it a point... to find some time to with meet each one of these groups, and as we began that time together, ...joy flooded my soul just to hear, just to be in their presence, just for me to see the joy on their faces, that look: ‘You see us.’”

*“But friends, I not only want to see these brothers and sisters. I want them to be a part of my life. I don’t want to assimilate them into my culture. I want to live with them and walk by them, side-by-side. And as much as we don’t like to hear the sound of the word *racism* — we don’t like that word — this [points to the worship leaders] is what we miss.”*

“You know we have moments like these at Annual Conference, and I’m so blessed and honored to be a part of this time. And we sing and we clap our hands, and we leave and we go back to business as usual. And the tears and the sorrow and the pain of these, our brothers and sisters, continue.”

“So don’t let this be just another good time, and you go back and say, ‘Remember when we had that good time at Annual Conference, when they had the band and the singers and the bishop broke a board and he didn’t break his hand?’”

“Let it be a beginning for us to sit down and learn a story different from our own. Racism is an evil thing.

It makes us miss the face and the voice of God in our brothers and sisters. As I have talked to these groups, they always tell me, ‘Bishop, we talk about this all the time.’ And in the pain of their voice, they say, ‘When are we going to do something?’

“Now is the time, and we are the people that can and will and must do it. Let’s do it. Let’s be the Church. This is what Heaven looks like. This is a foretaste.”

“Don’t let it end here. We are no longer going to run away from this sin of racism. We’re going to confess it no matter how painful it is. We are going to confess it, and maybe if we begin to confess it, God is faithful and God is just and will forgive us.”

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Honoring Retirees for Faithful Service

Sheila Ahler led the celebration of retirees for the class of 2022. She began by recognizing retirees from 2020 and 2021, enabling the gathered body to applaud their appreciation for these pastors whose retirements were previously acknowledged during online sessions of Annual Conference. The 35 retirees of 2022 and their spouses came forward to stand before a very grateful body. They enter into this next season of their lives and ministries with the thanks and prayers of the entire North Carolina Conference.

The 2022 retirees are: Kay Boone, Larry Bowden, Vernon Brown, Rufus Butner, Ross Carter, Helen Champion, Gene Cobb, John Crowe, Donald Daniel, Kenneth Davenport, Bryan Faggart, Penny Dollar Farmer, Carl Frazier, Ray Gooch, Sidney Hadden, Linda Harris, Tommy Hart, Kenneth Helms, Phyllis Hicks, Randy Hillman, Karen Howell, David Jones, Talton Madison, Ellen McCubbin, Brigette Freeman Morris, Charles Mosley, Joseph Perry, Timothy Russell, Thomas Supplee, Alan Swartz, Cara Thompson, Donna Thompson, Gene Tyson, Kelli Walker-Jones, Karen Whitaker, and Jenny Wilson.

Finance Reports, Budget Approved

As has been done in past years, financial reports were presented as a group from Conference Council on Finance & Administration and the Insurance, Pension, Equitable Compensation, and Medical Leave Committees.

Anne Lloyd, chair of the Conference Council on Finance Administration, expressed appreciation for the Conference's continued support of connectional ministries throughout the 2021 apportionment year. The annual Conference members approved the recommended budget of \$15,734,449 for the 2024 annual conference budget. This budget

represents a 2.21% increase from the approved 2023 budget which still represents a 28% reduction over the last six budget years.

The salary for district superintendents in 2023 was approved at \$112,766, with no change from the 2020-2022 approved salaries.

Insurance

The Conference approved a recommendation to change providers for the active health insurance plan to the

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Trustees Report

Much of the work of the Board of Trustees in the past year focused on conference property, conference legal matters, the disaffiliation process, and on churches that have closed. David Peele, chair, led the Annual Conference in prayer for the faithful churches who had to make these hard decisions.

As required by the legislation approved (§12553) by the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of The UMC, Peele outlined the process the Trustees developed for churches to disaffiliate from the denomination (available on the Conference website).

Peele stated, "While we grieve any departure from our shared connectional ministry, the Trustees worked to approve a plan that will allow for disaffiliation in a way we think will honor God and allow the North Carolina Conference to focus our ministry and energy on the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

The focus on providing a gracious exit for churches wishing to disaffiliate was further emphasized by Conference Chancellor Eric Stevens when he addressed the body to explain which aspects of the agreement that the Trustees were able to set and which were set by the *Book of Discipline*.

Our Conference and local churches have worked hard to

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Diversity Celebration

The Celebrating Diversity service started with Rev. Ernesto Barriguete, who welcomed the congregants and invited the UMC to continue its hard work to have “MÁS [more] DIVERSITY.” Barriguete reminded us that there is a place for all in Heaven. The diverse manifestations of worship offered to God Thursday night were a glimpse of Heaven.

Through the night, different worship leaders offered prayers of lament, truth-telling, and hope — always remembering God’s promise of a new and eternal life.

The celebration started with a traditional hymn, “The Old Rugged Cross,” led by our Native American brothers and sisters.

Through the use of martial arts, we were reminded of the importance of taking action to break with the sin of racism.

Bishop Leonard Fairley and several clergy came to the stage and were instructed to break wooden boards labeled with words representing racism barriers such as “inaction,” “disrespect,” “complacency,” and “injustice.” Those in attendance cheered and celebrated the efforts to dismantle racism.

Rev. Kong Namkung closed the martial arts portion by addressing those gathered, “I hope that in God’s sight, all of you are a black belt for anti-racism.”

After this, other manifestations of love and worship to God followed including a Mariachi Band who sang “Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore” in its original Spanish, a vibrant Burmese team of musicians who reminded us to “count our blessings,” and a prayer by Rev. Edith Salazar-Veliz.

Bishop Fairley ended the evening by offering a powerful reflection (see page 1) and encouraged all to “sit down and learn a story different from our own.”



Burmese musicians shared a song about counting our blessings. The choir was organized by Rev. Connie Stutts from Rhems UMC, New Bern.



The multi-cultural team of musicians led several songs during the Diversity Celebration on Thursday night.



ABOVE: Rev. Kong Namkung holds a board inscribed with “disrespect” for Rev. Ismael Ruiz-Millán to break as a symbol of breaking the barriers caused by racism.

LEFT: A Mariachi Band from Raleigh shared uplifting music including the hymn, “Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore,” in its original Spanish.

Thursday Morning Bible Study and Business Session Summary

Day two of Annual Conference 2022 began with music, prayer, and Rev. Dr. Janet Wolf's impactful Bible study.

Rev. Wolf opened with scripture from Mark 5, which she says is a challenge and an invitation. She stated, "The world waits for the church to be the body of Christ. To embody love, to practice the resurrection, to put flesh on a faith you can see. We are called to be the church, the body of Christ in and for and with the world." She encouraged conference members "to get ready" because "change is going to come."

Laura Dallas, NC Conference Media Center Director, shared that churches can borrow resources for free from the Media Center. She also highlighted services from Amplify Media, a UM Publishing House streaming service, which has Wesleyan Bible studies and devotionals. They are offering a discounted subscription for conference churches using promo code NC2022.

Rev. Laura Fine Ledford presented a report from the Board of Ordained Ministry as images of candidates commissioned over the past two years were displayed.

The Board of Ordained Ministry highlighted the ways they are seeking greater self-awareness and working to better support candidates throughout the ordination process.

Also during the morning session, Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, Director of the Clergy Health Initiative, shared findings from a recent clergy stress study and the impact of stress management programs on clergy health and spiritual well-being. Jaye White, Director of Outreach Ministry, shared several health opportunities available during the conference.

Thursday Afternoon Session Summary

Rev. Dr. Belton Joyner, chair of the Conference Episcopal Candidacy Steering Team, shared some of the thoughts that the team had about their "sacred responsibilities" as they prayerfully considered who the NC Conference delegation would put forward as an episcopal candidate.

They wanted someone who understood the work of the local church and knew the challenges and opportunities in churches of various sizes. Yet they also wanted the candidate to be someone with district and conference level experience as well as General Church experience. As the discussions began to center on one person who had all of these, Rev. Edith Gleaves, they realized she was also one who lived her life asking, "What would Jesus Christ want to happen? Then, that is the decision I will make."

Gleaves humbly accepted the nomination and shared her gratitude for the endorsement

and prayers of her conference and the call from God "for such a time as this." Bishop Fairley said, "When you have a gift, you share it. So, we are going to share you with the whole church." The election of bishops will take place at Jurisdictional Conference in November 2022.

Mark Hicks invited churches to actively participate in Cross and Key Ministries and the sharing of Disciple Bible Study in prisons. The ministry focuses on both mercy and justice and "responds to Christ's call to visit those in prison." Churches who do not have a prison ministry can reach out to Hicks and his team for assistance. Churches can support this ministry through a special offering on August 28.

Dail Ballard, Director of NC Camp and Retreat Ministries, shared how our three camps creatively met the challenges of a pandemic and helped kids unplug, de-stress, and



*Rev. Edith Gleaves,
episcopal candidate*

enjoy God's creation for the past two summers. The camps used cohorts of small group ministry, social distancing, and drive-through testing to make sure staff and campers stayed healthy. Then, one of the favorite times of Annual Conference occurred as Ballard invited the body to fly the toy airplanes which had been placed around the convention center during the lunch break.

A Message of Hope Shared at the Memorial Service

"You can't stay away from the fire." With these words, Rev. Dr. Kenneth Locklear extolled the service of our deceased clergy at the annual Memorial Service. He said they understood that their entire lives were dedicated to ministry along with their spouses. "They gave their lives to their calling," he said.

Locklear preached a message of hope using Paul's letters to the Corinthians. Sharing of his inner turmoil following a cancer diagnosis several years ago, Locklear shared that God showed him that either way his treatments went, he could be at peace. God reminded him that his grandmother, mother, and father were there in Heaven. And that here on earth, he was with his wife and son. "If I died, it was alright. If I lived, it was alright," he shared. "Only God – only God can give that kind of peace."

Locklear remembered those clergy and clergy spouses who have passed away since the last Annual Conference. "We pause to remember our colleagues in ministry and their helpmates as they journeyed in the faith to preach, to teach, and to pastor churches. We remember fondly



many stories...and the magnitude of wisdom that they had," said Locklear. "We thank God for the colleagues whom we celebrate today for their work and their ministry... [as] ministers of the Gospel to bring hope into a lost and dying world."

Clergy who have passed away since last Annual Conference:

Philip Sherman Brown
Eldrick Ray Davis
Marty Jeffrey Cauley
Bill James Locklear
Robert Gentry Harris, Jr.
Sidney Gene Hadden
Pearl Gooding West
Thomas Arnold Pope
Richard Leonhard
Jerry Milton Schronce
William Mac Jeffries, Sr.
John Edward Morrison

Willie Heber Frizzelle
Ronnie Lee Rivenbark
Robert Burton Storrs, Jr.
Margaret Cotton Foote
Eugene Ray Jenness
John Whitfield Hobbs
George Allen Jones
Richard Arnold Stanley, Jr.
Brian Glynn Gentle
James Carroll Lee
Margaret Anne Biddle
David Anthony Argo
Betty Bobbitt Willis
Michael Gordon Register

Clergy spouses who have died since last Annual Conference:

Martha Jane Williamson Moe
Pasquale Patrick DiGiuseppe
Christine O'Neal Wallace
Dilys R. Hale
Donald Champion
Doris D. Reynolds
Janet Karen Gallimore Argo
Winifred Browning
Jeanne Roberts Rouse
Helen Meredith Jones
Dolores M. Bowman
Loula Price Nicks
Margaret Louise McKita
Eugenia Shannon Stanley
Carol Turner Wenberg
Bernice G. Reynolds
Frances Bass White
Ethel Gaye Wall Mann

Trustees Report from page 2

be responsive to a bankruptcy proceeding for the Boy Scouts of America related to allegations of abuse. A new relationship agreement has been approved for BSA troops and churches to renew their charters after the temporary charters run out in June. Several healing steps are planned to support the real people behind this legal battle. More information will be shared soon. Please continue to pray for all survivors of the abuse.

Finance from page 2

HealthFlex Exchange program administered by Wespath Benefits and Investments. The Exchange program offers three health savings account options, two health reimbursement arrangements, and one preferred provider organization option. Rates will vary by plan option and coverage tier chosen by the participant.

Church rates will decrease by 5% with the Insurance Committee using earnings on plan reserves to supplement the rates to keep costs as low as possible for churches and participants.

The employee plus one child coverage tier changes to employee plus one, allowing this coverage level to be accessible to participants and their spouses instead of having to choose the family tier.

The life insurance remained the same but some wellness benefits were changed to align with programs offered through the HealthFlex Exchange.

Pension

The report of the Board of Pension was presented by Sheila Ahler, chair of the board. Under the Pre-82 Plan for retirement, clergy will receive \$834 per service year in 2023, an increase of 2.58% over the 2022 rate.

Retiree Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRA), based on the number of years of credit received toward retirement health insurance benefits, were approved to increase by 3% in 2023. In 2023, the maximum HRA for a pastor with 40 years or more in the plan will be funded at \$3,763 (90% of the maximum tier of \$4,181).



Sheila Ahler, Board of Pensions Chair

A change to the Ministers Transition Fund plan design was approved to be effective at the end of the Fund plan year, reducing the required years of contribution to the plan before receiving an employer discretionary contribution benefit from 10 years to 5 years.

Equitable Compensation

The minimum salary for full-time pastors for 2023 was approved to increase to \$48,320 (2.0%, \$947) and travel allowance to \$5,000 for full-time pastors.

Following a study by the Commission on Equitable Compensation, the setting of a minimum salary for student pastors was proposed to be discontinued.

Instead, a motion was passed by members of the annual conference to continue setting a minimum salary for student pastors at 65% of the full-time minimum salary (\$31,408 for 2023).

Clergy Medical Leave

The report of the Joint Committee on Clergy Medical Leave was approved as presented in the Conference Workbook.

Rules Vote Revisited

Citing her realization of remaining unanswered questions about an approved amendment to the conference Rules, Chris Ford, a lay member from the Fairway District made a motion Thursday morning to reconsider the amendment which had passed Wednesday afternoon.

Ford said that she was making the motion in the hopes of allowing the body to make a more informed decision regarding the Russell substitution amendment to the Standing Rules for In-Person Annual Conference (Section III, E.2). Before the session broke for lunch, votes on Ford's motion were counted by the tellers.

As the afternoon plenary session began, Bishop Fairley shared that the motion to reconsider passed; the business of the Annual Conference then turned to continued discussion and debate about the Russell amendment's merits. Speakers raised questions and concerns about the amendment which would require the Annual Conference's voting approval each year for the appointment of a second Assistant to the Bishop.

After much discussion, information from conference staff, and clarifications from committee chairs about the process of adding the second position, the Russell amendment was defeated.

The Standing Rules for In-Person Meetings were then adopted (with the Stallsworth amendment from Wednesday).

Those rules, the Standing Rules for Online Meetings, and the Lay Equalization Plan were then overwhelmingly approved together.