



Friday Wrap-Up

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022



North Carolina Conference
The United Methodist Church

Friday's Laity Celebration

The afternoon Laity Celebration included stories of challenge, healing, and hope. "God prepares the way and walks with us," said John Hall, Conference Lay Leader. In the pandemic, "We've learned that being perfect is not nearly as important as being authentic. As we have worked together, we've discovered or rediscovered that we really need each other. We've learned new ways to be the church."

During the celebration, Rev. Dr. Reginald Ponder shared information about The Gary Wayne Locklear Mission Endowment, named after the late Conference Lay Leader, and encouraged support of its vision of providing resources for new mission with people in our conference. More information is available at nccumc.org/mission-endowment.

Rev. Jaye White celebrated that over \$430,000 in grants have been made from the Mission Endowment since its inception. This year, grants were given to JFON Fayetteville, Robeson County Church & Community Center,

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Gary W. Locklear Center Consecrated

At the close of the Laity Celebration, Bishop Leonard Fairley announced that Panthia Locklear, wife of the late Home Missioner Gary Locklear, was present at Annual Conference. The Bishop introduced a video featuring clips from the June 2 consecration of the Gary W. Locklear Center at Branch Street UMC in Lumberton. The video featured a number of conference leaders sharing their joy that the center was complete. "Gary's vision for this building has come to life. We will bring in teams that will have a nice place to stay," said Rev. Bob Mangum.

Remembering their many interactions, Al Miller, Director of Disaster Ministries recalled Gary's constant focus: "We've got to do something for those who can't help themselves. We've got to do something for those who are hurting, both in my hometown, but across the state and across the world." Miller noted, "Every conversation ended with Gary talking about this place."

Ken Locklear, Gateway District Superintendent declared that, "[Gary's]...vision, his work, his impact shall live on in this place impacting the lives of other people out of the service that will be led from here."

Mrs. Locklear reflected on her husband's life and legacy, "He was all about missions; he was all about working; he was all about giving; he was all about helping others. So, this will go on. His legacy will live on."



Deaconess Brenda Brown enjoys a moment of humor with Bishop Leonard Fairley following her presentation in the Laity Celebration on Friday afternoon.

NC Conference Connectional Table Reports

Race, Equity, and Justice Ministries

Director Rev. Ernesto Barriguete shared an overview of the anti-racism work of our Conference Race, Equity, and Justice Ministries, highlighting the ways that anti-racism work is first and foremost discipleship work: loving people well and sharing the love of God with all our neighbors.

The ongoing work of increasing racial equity awareness includes offering the Intercultural Development Inventory program widely across the Conference; providing additional anti-racism training opportunities; the addition of five questions about anti-racism activities in local churches to NCC Charge Conference reports; and encouraging and supporting cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments.

Barriguete also moderated a panel that helped to explore the ministry's anti-racism work at

all levels of church life. Panelists Steve Taylor, Rev. Sunny Limm, Rev. Beth Hood, Carmella McKeller, and Bishop Fairley answered questions that the team often is asked.

Native American Ministries

Rev. Mattheue Locklear shared the work of Native American Ministries in our conference, including leadership development, reading programs, and a mission to Bolivia. He celebrated the Native American clergy and laity in the conference. These ministries are supported by the annual Native American Ministries Sunday offering taken each spring. He noted that the UMC's work in the past and present has made a difference in the Native American community.

Hispanic-Latinx Ministries

Sara Cortes celebrated the ways that the ministry of Hispanic-Latinx Committee has grown. She shared that the committee has formed partnerships throughout our conference to support the development of leadership courses in Spanish, the certification of Lay Ministers, and the commissioning and ordination of Spanish-speaking clergy. Cortes urged those gathered to step up and intentionally open spaces, and open opportunities, and open our hearts, and let the Holy Spirit guide us in the church.

Strengthening the Black Church

Rev. Rhonda Grant Jordan shared the work in our Conference to strengthen black churches within our Conference and cultivate



At the close of the panel discussion on anti-racism work, Rev. Sunny Limm shared an insight, "I just want to say that the work of being anti-racist is nothing but being an expert in loving one another. So, I want you to embrace it. It's not a side job, it is our main job."

black leaders, laity, and clergy, for our Conference. The committee is bringing black pastors together regarding the Comprehensive Plan to help bridge gaps. Scholarships to retreats and funding for Zoom accounts are prioritized. They are also financially assisting seminary students, churches, and clergy.

Asian Ministries

Rev. Joseph Park shared the good work of Asian Ministries in the past year including a time of prayer for the people of Myanmar and packing school supplies for children in the Philippines. The team also offered virtual English tutoring for missionaries in the Philippines, and sought to develop relationships with Asian students and faculty at Duke Divinity School. The committee is interested in connecting with churches to further their work and support anti-racism efforts.

Survey Request

As the office of Race, Equity, and Justice Ministries seeks to support and equip our anti-racism spiritual transformation, the team wants to offer the best schedule of opportunities for all to participate. They ask that you scan the QR code below and fill out a two-question survey so that they can prepare better to serve the conference. Let's better equip our people for Más Diversity.



Connectional Table Reports *continued from page 2*

Congregations 4 Children

Director David Rockefeller shared how churches have helped support literacy for children in the face of numerous pandemic challenges. C4C has added an emphasis on advocacy for children in public education, providing webinars and additional online resources to help churches strengthen the public schools in their communities.

Fayetteville Justice for Our Neighbors

Donna Akuamoah, an immigration attorney with the Fayetteville Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), shared their work to reunite separated migrant families and advocating against unjust immigration policies. JFON assisted over 200 families last year through legal assistance and advocacy. Akuamoah thanked those gathered for their financial support of this ministry.

Conference Health Team

Rev. Lindsay Ballance Collins shared the work of the Conference Health Team, including bi-monthly COVID updates, information about accessing the state's opioid settlement resources, and addressing the mental health epidemic that has resulted from the pandemic.

Evangelism and Discipleship

After inviting Bishop Fairley to sing "Jesus Loves the Little Children" with him, Rev. Terry Williams then invited those who

work with young people to mark their calendars for the "ABC's of Diversity" virtual presentation planned for Aug. 23 on Zoom.

The stories behind this year's Harry Denman Evangelism Awards, granted by the Foundation for Evangelism, were shared. This year's recipients were Rev. Stephen Dunn, Farmville UMC; laity Gayle Tabor, St. Paul UMC: Carolina Beach; and lay youth Jacey Hilburn, Gardner's UMC.

Center for Leadership Excellence (CLE)

Director Leah Wiebe-Smith shared the work of the CLE, which adapted and provided 50 online events since March 2020, with over 3,800 participants. A cohort program for small churches, called Impact, is beginning this fall. Upcoming programs also include Crisis Communications (on Zoom) and an in-person day of learning about Leading During Anxious Times. Details are available at nccumc.org/leadership.

Christian Unity and Interreligious Relations

Rev. Grayson Hicks Dye shared some of the work of the CUIR in our conference, including a presence at the Wild Goose Festival, an ecumenical gathering in the western part of the state, and partnering with the CLE for an in-person Christian Unity Event on Sept. 27.

Church & Society

Rev. Molly White brought greetings from the Conference

Board of Church and Society. In the past year, many local congregations have developed social justice ministries to address racism, creation care, and other justice concerns. Information about available grants and award monies for this work are posted online at nccumc.org/christian-formation/church-and-society. White encouraged churches to contact the committee for information about studies and tools to help with the practice of justice in our communities.

Safe Sanctuaries

Rev. Mamie Alley offered a word of encouragement as churches continue to navigate challenging circumstances while still seeking to faithfully enact Safe Sanctuaries policies to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults. She suggested that Safe Sanctuaries be seen as a holy habit to be practiced, not a policy to be followed. It is a tool to equip us to make disciples.

Financial Discipleship

Rev. Rick Clayton shared that the Financial Discipleship Team is available to provide inspirations and guidance and help foster a spirit of generosity in our churches. He acknowledged that financial security is a concern and declared that, "Finance is a faith matter." The team offers Zoom consultations to help churches address congregational concerns, set goals, and brainstorm stewardship sermon series. They seek to serve as a resource to help congregations face the challenges of this time.



A Little Basketball, a Little Ice Cream, and a LOT of Rain

The evening started hot and ended in a flurry of wind and rain.

What's Annual Conference without the obligatory downpour from a thunderstorm? This time it came on the ONE night we were supposed to be outside.

But we ate the ice cream and folks of all ages took shots at the Campus Ministries' sponsored basketball challenge.

The evening was an informal chance to gather with our friends and colleagues. No one had a chance to see everyone they wanted to see before the ice cream was melting, the basketball apparatus began to deflate, and the storm was coming.

And come it did! It was like the end of Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel! We did not, however, slay the 450 prophets of Baal at the brook of Kishon. However...we happily slew about 450 bowls of ice cream.

Conference Statistician's Report

Rev. George Speake presented the Statisticians Report (pgs. 82-83, Workbook), providing insight to the trends happening in worship, participation, and giving in our local churches.

- Total number of Professing Members decreased from 218,982 in 2020 to 214,320 in 2021. Speake assured the body that a significant portion of those numbers are a result of membership audits that churches have conducted during the pandemic.
- Even taking into consideration the challenges and uncertainty in measuring attendance during seasons of online and hybrid worship, total worship attendance was down in 2021 compared to 2020. Total in-person average worship attendance in 2021 was down 13,342 from 2020. Similarly,

online average attendance in 2021 was down 8,263 from 2020.

- In good news, baptisms in 2021 were 696, up 310 from 2020.
- While total church apportionment giving was around 85.5%, more good news is that the amount contributed to the UM Special Sundays offerings increased by \$28,907 over 2020.

As part of his role as Conference Statistician, Speake often advises churches on their Table and Charge Conference reports. He sought to provide clarity about the categories of membership and the ways that churches have been unintentionally misreporting numbers in these categories because of misinterpreting their meaning. The differences and nuances between Professing members, Baptized members, and Constituents can be confusing, but pastors and congregations are encouraged to reach out to him for clarifications and assistance.

Speake also challenged the churches to engage in intentional work on evangelism and stewardship. One recommendation is to use *Not Your Parent's Offering Plate* by J. Clif Christopher, a six-chapter book that can be a short-term study for finance and stewardship teams.

Other recommendations are available to be checked out from the Conference Media Center. Visit the Media Center website at nccumc.org/media-center to review recommendations in the "Resources by Topic" section on Stewardship.

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Friday Morning Plenary Session Summary

Bishop Fairley opened the Friday morning plenary session with a moment of silence and a time of prayer in the wake of another shooting in our country, this time at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Vestavia Hills, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama.

Celebrating the Connection

The Bishop then came before the Annual Conference to share his deep love of The United Methodist Church.

He spoke of the importance and significance of being a connectional church by sharing his own experience of growing up with few resources except the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

As a boy, the Bishop longed to know and be a part of a living connection where that love connects churches and people. He shared a video about the cultivation of a river bridge, woven from the roots of a living tree, that is strong enough to survive the raging waters of monsoon season in Meghalaya, India. The Bishop invited us to imagine The United Methodist Church as a similarly strong, woven-together living connection.

What this living connection looks like here in the North Carolina Conference was illustrated through a #BeUMC video featuring the witness of NCC clergy and laity who shared what they love about the denomination. This video is available on the Conference website: nccumc.org/beumc/#video.

Bishop Fairley concluded by sharing his own conviction that this connection will continue to be both missional and evangelistic, seeking justice and sharing the Gospel so all would know the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Disaster Response Special Offering

A special offering was collected to support Tornado Relief in Kentucky and Tennessee. Connectional Ministries director Steve Taylor gave glory to God for our Disaster Ministries, led by Al Miller, which have helped thousands of eastern NC families after hurricanes and have extended into western NC and Kentucky after the devastation of tornadoes and to Louisiana after the devastation of hurricanes.

Congregations were encouraged to participate in Emergency Response Trainings and Neighbor-to-Neighbor Training as we continue to support and equip the members of our churches to participate in this important ministry.

Nominations Committee

Christine Dodson presented the nominations slate for district and conference committees, with additions and corrections. After another addition from the floor, the report was approved by the voting body. We give thanks for the faithful service and leadership of the many clergy and laity who support the work of our districts and annual conference.

Methodist Home for Children

Rev. Bruce Stanley brought greetings from the Methodist Home for Children (MHC), which serves an average of 1,600 young people and families per year.

Stanley, who serves as MHC Executive Director, introduced Sammy Hudson, a camp director in eastern North Carolina who seeks to share the love of Jesus with young people.

Hudson told his own story of encountering a young man who came to his camp after suffering significant, horrific abuse. His family was asked to take in this child as foster parents and quickly found that they were overwhelmed and ill-equipped to provide the care needed in this situation. The Methodist Home for Children stepped in to provide support and training for Hudson and his family.

Stories like Sammy's are made possible by our Conference's support of the Methodist Home for Children. There is a growing need for foster families, and Stanley asked that all our churches pray and consider encouraging families who might consider being equipped as foster families.

Of course, financial support is also greatly appreciated. He challenged all congregations to participate in the 1K for 1 Kid campaign which focuses on the need to raise at least \$1,000 per child in donations to supplement grants and other funding for MHC's work.

First Four Resolutions Addressed on Friday Evening

Beginning in January, prior to Annual Conference, the Resolutions Committee solicits resolutions from churches, church members, conference agencies, and even Sunday School classes. In these resolutions, the authors bring attention to issues. The committee receives, edits, and then presents the resolutions to the entire Annual Conference.

Five of this year's submitted resolutions, beginning on page 87 of the Conference Workbook, were crafted by our youth at their Annual Conference Session gathering in July 2021.

These resolutions were written and debated by youth from around the Conference and reflected issues important to them. They invite us to add our voices to theirs.

1. Resolution 1 encouraged the Annual Conference to advocate for Puerto Rico to become a state in the United States. Rachel Ward, a youth from Fuquay-Varina UMC had us strike the 18th, 19th, and 20th whereas sections because those were no longer relevant. After an interesting debate, the resolution passed by majority vote.
2. Resolution 2 encouraged the Annual Conference to consider advocating for plus-sized women to be more represented in media. There was heated discussion about the connection between weight and health. Rev. Dave Allen, pastor and campus minister from the Corridor District, stated that it is possible to be healthy at various

weights. He also said there is great harm caused when we link diets with spiritual discipline. An amendment was made to add language expanding the resolution to include male, female, and non-binary persons. After some discussion, the entire resolution was tabled.

3. Resolution 3, a resolution addressing the need for Conference staffing specifically dedicated to youth ministry, shows the power of resolutions to effect change. Following its adoption at the youth ACS meeting in 2021, part of the resolution has been enacted by the Bishop. Beginning July 1, 2022, a part-time pastor will be appointed as youth coordinator for the Annual Conference. Rev. Jason Villegas will seek to build strong relationships between the conference, districts, and local churches to foster collaborative and effective connectional youth ministry. The entire Annual Conference pledged to support our youth and Villegas.
4. Resolution 4 calls for the creation of safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth and adults within the conference. The Resolutions Committee voted to refer Resolution 4 back to the Youth and recommended that they collaborate with the Conference Board of Church and Society to clarify the language and make specific recommendations about the definition and implementation of "safe spaces." A motion made to expand the language in the resolution to include all youth failed 231 to 341.

Resolution 4 was then referred back to the Youth to be addressed in the legislative sessions of the upcoming NCCUMC Youth Week.

Due to the length of the afternoon plenary session, Bishop Fairley announced that Resolutions 5-7 would be discussed at Saturday morning's business session.

Laity from page 1

The Anchor Church, and the Church at Spring Forest.

Deaconess Brenda Brown explained the different types of laity mission designations and shared details about the many and varied ways she lives into her call to serve her community.

Conference Youth President Emily Lain expressed thanks for everyone who helped conference youth overcome the challenges the pandemic brought and celebrated that the conference has reaffirmed its support of youth ministry by creating a part time youth staff position at the conference level.

Presentations also included Michael Priddy, president of the Clergy Spouse Association, and David Teal, Director of Laity and Spiritual Leadership for UM Discipleship Ministries.

In closing, Hall thanked the laity for "...keeping the lights on. Thank you for being the church in your community, at the pool, on the playground, and in your neighborhood."