

Overview – Carol Goehring & Jerry Bryan

Jerry

Greetings to all of you from the North Carolina Annual Conference, and the Annual Conference Planning Committee. There are many folks who are involved in the preparation for Annual Conference. So, as the Annual Conference Secretary, I speak for all of them, and our Bishop in welcoming you to this time of orientation and overview of what you can expect when we all meet together at the Greenville Convention Center, June 12-15.

Carol

Hello, Jerry and members of the NC Conference of the UMC. In 2013, the Annual Conference will be different from previous sessions, and yet, some things never change.

Jerry

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, one of our own, is presiding over the Annual Conference, as she has, if you will, returned home to Eastern NC. Beginning with worship, the members of the Conference will gather for Holy Communion Wednesday morning, June 12, at 10am.

Carol

Then, following worship, the Organization of the Conference occurs, as the Bishop calls the Conference to Order. These actions occur just after the singing of the great hymn of Methodism, “And Are We Yet Alive.” This hymn’s been used as the beginning of the Business Session for Annual Conference every year for as long as I can remember. What’s behind that tradition, Jerry?

Jerry

It happens at this time of the year all over the world at Methodist and United Methodist sessions of Annual Conference and other gatherings. We gather together, clergy and laity, members, guests, and friends, and we stand and sing “lustily and with good courage,” as John Wesley said, the great Charles Wesley hymn “And Are We Yet Alive.” It’s a moment of celebration for our common heritage and common mission and the ties that

bind us in the faith and the connection, and it is a moment of thanks to God for the experiences we have had since our last gathering.

There's no requirement that this be the opening hymn at Annual Conference, but it is, indeed, a cherished custom, which we and most of our brothers and sisters around the world choose to observe.

Carol

Thank you. That is a good explanation and it fits with the theme of this year's conference: We Grow, from Strength to Strength. Living things are growing and reproducing, and in our context as people of faith, we are alive in Jesus Christ, growing as disciples and producing fruit for God's Kingdom.

We anticipate a full house this year. More youth and young adults are registered as members of the Conference than we ever have had before. And we will, indeed, include some new items on the agenda. More time will be devoted to teaching and equipping our members for service. And, as always, we expect to worship in ways that draw us closer to God and to one another. We'll also conduct some business as an Annual Conference.

Jerry

Everything that we do Greenville is actually a part of the Conference. When you received your recent mailing from my office regarding registration, dates, etc., you began participating in the 2013 Annual Conference. As Lay Members you were elected by your Church or Charge to represent them, along with your pastor. For your information, our conference is comprised of 1120 clergy persons, and 1120 lay persons, to balance out the membership. So we are a large group. When you register in the lobby of the Greenville Convention Center, you will receive a packet of materials that will be helpful during the proceedings of the Conference. Included in the packets will be your name tag (which you are asked to wear at all times), a copy of the NC Christian Advocate in which you will find reports, and information that will be discussed and/or utilized at the business sessions of the conference. Also, I would like to point out that you are urged and encouraged to go the NC Conference Website where you will find a link to the 2013 Annual Conference, and you can find all the reports, and other

items to study before you arrive at Conference. Also, you will be given a Fan/Plaque, that looks like this, to have and if you have questions or want to be recognized by the Bishop, you're asked to raise this high and we will try to recognize you as soon as possible and you will be given the opportunity to make your statement or ask your question so that the Bishop or the Conference can deal with it.

You'll have a copy of the agenda of the Annual Conference, which will guide us through the Annual Conference. Also, you will have a copy of the agenda that you can place in the badge cover of your name tag.

It is our intention to follow the agenda as closely as possible. There might times arising that some slight changes to the agenda are necessary and that will be announced by the presiding officer (the Bishop).

Carol

Yes, and thank you for posting the agenda for the Annual Conference online. Three great presenters will teach at this year's conference. Rev. Tom Berlin and Dr. Lovett Weems will speak in three plenaries, reflecting on the work they have done in co-authoring the book, *Bearing Fruit: Ministry With Real Results*. Tom Berlin is a pastor from the Virginia Annual Conference. Currently serving a church that is committed to reaching out to the local community and the world. Lovett Weems is a pastor, educator, and church leader, serving as the Director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Jerry

In addition to Tom Berlin and Lovett Weems, we will be privileged to hear from Rev. Candace Lewis, who serves as New Church Strategist with Path 1, our denomination's leading resource for best practices for starting new faith communities. She is a pastor, and an excellent teacher and preacher. Her contributions to this year's Annual Conference, like our other guests', will be many. On Wednesday evening, Rev. Lewis will preach at the celebration of New Faith Communities and the anniversary of the Ten Dollar Club, which helped in the building of many new churches over this conference in the last 60 years in this conference. She will teach the Bible study on Thursday morning, and will also lead one of the Breakout Groups.

Carol

And this is a great time to mention another learning opportunity for all conference members. On Friday morning, as you said, we will offer 8 Breakout Sessions, 90 minutes each, on a variety of topics. Each member of the conference may attend 1 of the 8. Tom Berlin will talk about “Leading Toward Fruitfulness.” Lovett Weems will present another called, “Key Challenges Facing United Methodist Churches.” Candace Lewis will lead a group as she titles it, “Strengthening the Black Church.” She’s the founding pastor of a church in Jacksonville, FL that in 1997 began with 7 persons and 11 years later, had over 200 members.

Jerry

So, that is an introduction to 3 of the Breakout Sessions, what about the rest?

Carol

Well, for a full list and description of the breakout sessions, check the website. I hope everyone will register in advance for one of the Breakout sessions, so that we may have adequate seating for everyone. We have some great opportunities, and these will be in the Convention Center and in the hotel adjacent to the GCC, on Friday morning at 8:30am.

Jerry

One of the other exciting opportunities for the conference members and others, including church groups, youth groups, and children of delegates, etc., is the 15th Anniversary of Stop Hunger Now. To celebrate that ministry, we are planning to package 100,000 meals – a goal set by our Bishop – to relieve the hunger and suffering of people around the world. There are 3 ways you can participate in this ministry: volunteer to package the food or donate to help pay the cost of shipping to crisis burdened areas of the world or to school feeding programs in impoverished communities. At a cost of \$.25 per meal, the food is a bargain. We need \$25,000 to meet our goal.

Carol

Well, you said there are 3 ways to participate, and one is to volunteer to package the food, another is to donate to the shipping costs, and the 3rd? I guess that would be, to do both! Again, go to the Conference website, and

sign up to package food on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday; and give to the offering that will be collected during our opening worship on Wednesday morning. While we feast at the Lord's Table, we're mindful of how much we've been given, we can also give to extend that table of plenty to others. It's a great thing to see a hands-on opportunity at Annual Conference.

Jerry

Maybe this is a good time to mention the footwork. On Friday morning, before the breakout sessions, Conference members can join a 5K Run/Walk, a non-competitive opportunity to move, to enjoy the health benefits and the fellowship. You have seen the announcement about this in the materials that we mailed out to you.

Carol

Jerry, we are just getting started in describing all that goes on at Annual Conference. We can't possibly cover all of this in this presentation, so just to lift up a few more things that will be different this year, the executive sessions for lay members of the annual conference will be held on Wednesday afternoon in one section of the Convention Center, while the clergy executive session is held in another section of the Convention Center. At the same time, and this is a first, the youth will have an orientation to Annual Conference in Ballroom D of the Hilton. Another first, all conference members are invited to a picnic on Thursday evening. The picnic will feature the ministries of Higher Education and Campus Ministry and students and alumni will be available to speak informally about the schools and their ministry centers. The Praise Band from Methodist University, called Common Ground, will provide some entertainment. And everyone attending is encouraged to wear a favorite school t-shirt and comfortable attire for this tent event. The picnic's free, and participants may give to the special offering that will support student participation in Exploration, to provide travel and registration costs for students discerning a call to ministry.

Jerry

The picnic, though free, is being sponsored by some of our conference Institutions. Methodist University, NC Wesleyan College, Louisburg

College, United Methodist Foundation, the Methodist Home for Children and the United Methodist Retirement Homes. So, we thank them very much for their sponsorship of this picnic. Among the things that we do every year, worship is a highlight at Annual Conference. We will again celebrate the lives of saints who have passed on in the last year, clergy members and clergy spouses. The ministries of the Laity will be featured in a celebration on Friday evening. The Commissioning and Ordination and Licensing of pastors will be the final worship experience on Saturday.

Carol

Business items include the budget and proposed changes to the insurance provision for retired clergy, and a few constitutional amendments will be voted on. All of these matters requiring a vote, of course, will be fully explained before any vote is taken.

Jerry

And we will clarify who may vote, as we do every year at the time of organization of the Conference.

For all of our conference members, if you have not already done so, make arrangements now for your lodging in Greenville. A list of options may be found in the material that came to you in the recent mailing. Anticipate a full and exciting time from 10am on Wednesday until around noon on Saturday, June 12-15. And when we gather, the Spirit of the Living God will be among us. Through our fellowship, worship and essential reports for action, we will be reminded that in Christ, we move from Strength to Strength, growing as disciples and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.